

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF THE FALL OF THE  
MILITARY GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA UNDER  
GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON, 1966-1975

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II in 1945, more than two-thirds of the countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa have experienced varying levels of military intervention. According to an observation made by W.F. Gutteridge, in Africa alone, the frequency of coups ranked highest in the world between 1960 and 1970. He recorded that:

Between January 1963 and the end of February 1966, there were fourteen significant cases of political intervention by the military in African independent states. By early 1968, there had been nineteen successful military coups and by the end of 1970, the total number of relevant major incidents in Africa in eight years was near to thirty.<sup>1</sup>

The frequency with which African soldiers have entered the political arena has provided me with the challenge of analyzing military politics with special reference to my country, Nigeria. I have chosen to investigate the fall of the military regime under General Yakubu Gowon for my analysis for two reasons. First, the Gowon administration produced in Nigerian history the most stable military interregnum. Secondly, occurring at this time is the historical incidence of the emergence of some hitherto unknown soldiers into national prominence, and the sudden oil boom especially after the oil crisis of 1973, which has been the cornerstone of the structural distortion of the Nigerian

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<sup>1</sup>W. F. Gutteridge, Military Regimes in Africa, Studies in African History, Vol. II (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1976), p. 1.

economy intensified by neo-colonialism.

In discussing the fall of Gowon I have employed two assumptions which are that:

- (1) The fall of Gowon was largely due to the function of a powerful interest group within the Nigerian army; and
- (2) Gowon's government had become ineffective in dealing with those policies which had earlier made him god-like in the eyes of his subjects.

Several writers among whom were Ayo Fasanmi, in his article captioned "Corruption Rides On!"<sup>2</sup> and the London Observer in an article entitled "Can Gowon Halt Nigerian Corruption in Time?"<sup>3</sup> have indicated that the Gowon's Administration was nothing but a corrupt government and being so it was appropriate that he be ousted. This study challenges that assumption. Rather, it introduces a new dimension of personality conflict, the adventent lust that some emmergent class had for power acquisition, as well as discusses the personal desire to "share from the nation's cake," that a group of the Nigerian army, whom I interchangeably refer to throughout the study as either power interest group, or war officers had.

For purposes of clarity, power interest group is used as a term in referring to some military officers who fought at the battlefield during the Nigerian Civil War. After the war, the officers constituted themselves as a faction within the Nigerian Army and sort the ousting

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<sup>2</sup>Ayo Fasanmi, "Corruption Rides On!" The Nigerian Tribune, April 23, 1975, pp. 4, 9.

<sup>3</sup>Frank Thompson (correspondent), "Can Gowon Halt Nigerian Corruption in Time?" London Observer, February 19, 1975, p. 6.

of the Military Government of Nigeria under General Yakubu Gowon with a view of being the leaders of the country. Therefore, expressed views and other issues, especially those relating to the control of oil business which was the main economic resource of Nigeria at the time under study are used to examine my assertions.

The historical analysis approach has been employed as the research methodology for this study. According to Jerome Clubb, in his essay "The Historical-Analytical Approach," this approach is a historical investigation which help facilitates findings of greater generality and increase the researchers confidence in the validity and relevance of his work.

My rational for using this methodology is due to my personal limitation in terms of direct observation and participation. Beside this point, I felt that the study of political phenomena in a variety of historical context could (at least in principle) contribute to my developing generalizations which could serve me in better understanding the characteristics of Nigeria politics in its own content.

The data for the study were collected through the following source; political science and economic textbooks, journals, magazines, government documents, speeches and broadcasts, newspapers, personal letters and interviews with some Nigerian citizens.

The study is presented as follows: chapter one deals with the rise of the military in Nigerian power politics. It looks into the initial stages or beginning of the organization of special constabulary

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<sup>4</sup>D. M. Freeman, The Foundation of Political Science, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1972, p. 362.

forces by British traders during the second half of the nineteenth century. Using this as a base period, the chapter traces the historical developments from its successes and failures under the first Nigerian Civilian Administration to the army's intervention in Nigerian power politics.

The historical and chronological sequence of the growth of the Nigerian army is given in this chapter to acquaint the reader with the events that follow in the remaining chapters. In addition, the chapter informs the reader about the post independent Nigerian political economy under the first rulers who led the country to independence in 1960.

Since the objective of this thesis is to test the assumption that the fall of Gowon was caused by the forces of a few military officers and not because of corruption, an indepth analysis of Yakubu Gowon's performance as the Chief Executive is given in chapter two. To better understand Gowon's regime, an objective critique of the Ironsi's Administration which preceded that of Gowon is provided. Dialectically, it is only with the understanding and comparing the shortcomings of both the civilian administration as well as the brief military leadership provided by General Aguiyi Ironsi that the reader would understand the Gowon's Administration, its milestone achievements, and the dynamics of its fall.

Continuing from the broad premises given in the first two chapters, chapter three examines the power interest group within the Nigerian armed forces. It is set out by reviewing theoretically the motives of



military intervention. It further discusses the issues of personality conflict, as well as competing ambition for control of the economy. Here again, emphasis is placed on the economic factor under a state capitalist economy to examine my assumptions.

The complete work provides the reader with a detailed understanding of the contradictions and dynamics of Nigerian power politics beginning with the colonial era and ending in 1975. In addition, it helps to clarify, to a large extent, the level to which competition for available scarce resources developed an interest group as a class within the Nigerian army.

Above all, it is hoped that this study could be used as a resource for a more detailed work in studying Nigerian military politics.

# CHAPTER I

## THE RISE OF THE MILITARY IN NIGERIAN POWER POLITICS

The objective of this chapter is to trace the growth of the Nigerian army from the time of its inception to its participation in power politics. It looks into the initial stages when the army was organized as a special constabulary force by British traders during the second half of the nineteenth century. It further examines its successes and failures during the first Nigerian Civilian Administration, and finally, it examines the impact of coups in other African states on the Nigerian army using the contagion theory as a means of explanation.

This historical explanation is very important in the study because all the aspects discussed when combined provide a useful basis for understanding the past and present dynamics of the Nigerian military. Above all it helps acquaint the reader with the internal contradictions within the army which finally led to the overthrow of General Yakubu Gowon. Therefore, the chapter examines the above factors in three settings, the historical development of the Nigerian army before 1966, the weaknesses of the first republic which increased the powers and vision of the army, as well as highlight the influence of the decade of military coups in Africa which acted as a catalyst in the Nigerian army coming into politics.

### The Nigerian Army Before 1966

The Nigerian army has its origin in the second half of the nineteenth century. The army was organized by the British explorers and traders, their purpose being "to help carry out the British conquest of what is now Nigeria."<sup>1</sup> The earliest of such organization was Glover's Hausas, a constabulary force organized at Lagos in 1863 by Lt. R. N. Glover. The Oil Rivers Irregulars, another constabulary force, was raised in the East Coast of Nigeria after the proclamation of the Oil River Protectorate in 1885. This force was later renamed Niger Coast Constabulary, and was stationed at Calabar. In addition to these forces was another force called the Royal Niger Company Constabulary. This later constabulary force was organized in the Northern part of Nigeria by Sir George Goldie. It was further reorganized in 1900 by Lord Lugard who renamed it Northern Nigerian Regiment.

It was these various paramilitary establishments that were united to form the Nigerian Regiment to the West African Frontier Force in 1914, at the time of Lord Lugard's amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria to form the present day Nigeria.

Like all regiments of the West African Frontier Force, the Nigerian regiment having been established, was:

Created not to defend the inhabitants against foreign attacks, but to assist foreigners to conquer the country. They had British officers but at least as far as the rank and file were concerned, they were mercenary armies. They

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<sup>1</sup>N. J. Miners, The Nigerian Army 1956-1966 (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1969), p. 3.

were generally enlisted in the more backward parts of the country and were quite ready to suppress rebellions against colonial rule that might arise elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

This was evident during the 1948 riots in (Gold Coast) Ghana when two Nigerian battalions were sent there. Their purpose being to patrol troubled areas and to provide town piquets.

Between 1957 and 1960 when Nigeria became independent, the functions of the military forces were localized, and the duties of the Royal Nigerian Army defined as the "immediate defense of Nigeria from outside attack, and to aid the civil power in the maintenance of internal security."<sup>3</sup>

Nigerian soldiers had not been very popular in the country. "Perhaps this was due to their origin, having evolved from poor and runaway slaves,"<sup>4</sup> as well as being brutal to the masses of people. For example, in the nineteenth century, the Niger Coast Constabulary was referred to as the "forty thieves," Furthermore, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, recounted in 1926:

Within sight of the school he could see the square fort and the sentries behind the parapets....  
We did not like the soldiers; they were our own people and had conquered us for strangers and had defeated our people on the plain just before us.  
This feeling was very common all over the North.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>A. H. M. Kirk Green and S. C. Ulgrabi, Historical Society of Nigeria (Lagos: Onibonoje Printing Press, 1964), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>A. Haywood and F. A. S. Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force (Aldershot: Gale and Pollen, 1964), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>V. A. Olorunsola, Soldiers and Power: The Development Performance of the Nigerian Military Regime (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, University of California, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Sir Ahmadu Bello, My Life (Kaduna: Onibonyie Press, 1968), p. 67.

The soldiers' low rate of pay added to the army's minimal prestige.

Mr. Enah, an ex-serviceman, told the parliament in 1963 that:

People are jeered at when they want to join the army. The reason being that soldiers are treated no better than laborers.... There is a psychology in this country that when someone is badly paid that man is inferior.<sup>6</sup>

Yet another source of the very humble but ill-fated beginning of the Nigerian army was the class from which they were drawn. Most often they were from illiterate classes enlisted from the more backward parts of the country. In 1963, an editorial comment appeared in the West African Pilot supporting this idea; it read:

If the present state of affairs exists simply because our soldiers are drawn mainly from the illiterate class and do not compare favourably with their counterparts in the outside world, then a case has been made for government to answer, but certainly on no account should soldiers be molested or abused. Such epithets as "afamako" and "abobaku," whatever they mean, must be stopped.<sup>7</sup>

Promotion prospects were poor in the army in the beginning as compared to other segments in government service. Under the British army, Nigerian officers moved gradually up the normal ladder of promotion. For example, as N. J. Miners noted, it took two years for a soldier to move from the ranks of second lieutenant to captain and seven years for him to move from captain to major."<sup>8</sup> Under these circumstances, it became almost impossible to attract

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<sup>6</sup>Enah, West African Pilot, Vol. 372 (April 2, 1963), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>N. J. Miners, The Nigerian Army 1956-1966 (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1969), p. 49.

educated people into the Nigerian army.

By 1960, the Nigerian military forces were under the leadership of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. During his administration a House of Representatives Select Committee was set up to survey the whole field of Nigerianization. Among other things, this committee recommended that the Nigerian army be completely managed by the Nigerian government instead of the War Office in Britain. Furthermore, it recommended the immediate displacement of senior expatriate officers on the grounds that their loyalties to Nigeria after independence would be divided. The acceptance of these recommendations by the government marked the beginning of the rise to prominence of the Nigerian army.

Actions to increase the supply of potential officers were taken quickly on a number of lines. For example, there were greater efforts to publicize the army. Consequently, officers were sent to secondary schools to speak to students. Cadet units were established in some of the schools. Example of such were Kings College in Lagos, Government College in Zaria, Government College in Keffi, and at the Katsina Secondary School. In addition to this, some incentive programs were introduced; for example, the long standing complaints about car was solved by giving military officers car advance. Pension schemes were introduced. All secondary school students enlisted were sent to Sandhurst in England for training. And there was a considerable raise in the soldiers monthly salary.

By the end of 1960, the army was seen as a symbol of new national consciousness. This was further enhanced when later in the year, a battalion of the Nigerian army infantry division was sent to join the United Nations Peace Keeping Operation in Congo (Zaire). With this, the army had succeeded in changing the negative impressions that people had of them. Moreover, they had begun to symbolize the modern and technically efficient Nigerian army that was hoped for.

Although this step had been accomplished, the army experienced many contradictions between 1964 and 1966. P. C. Lloyd, a prolific writer at the time, records that:

Cohesive as the military elite may appear in contrast with other elite groups, it was not without its own divisions. Many of the junior officers were thus more highly educated with several of them university graduates. Their military training and promotion had been far more rapid as armies have grown in size, and been Africanized, and they tend to be more radical than their superior officers.<sup>9</sup>

The period between 1964 and 1966 not only revealed the tendencies of personality clashes, conflicting interests within the army, but, it also showed how the first civilian government unduly politicized and introduced the vices of tribalism and sectionalism into the otherwise neutral institution of the army.

Thus, in the following paragraphs we shall examine the role of the weakness of the first civilian administration as a contributing factor to the growth of the Nigerian military in power politics.

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<sup>9</sup>P. C. Lloyd, "Military Coups," Africa in Social Change (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1967), p. 321.

### Weakness of the First Republic

Discussing military coups in Africa, P. C. Lloyd writes:

The Nigerian Military Coup of January 1966 was the consequence of a complex situation in which most of the conflicts cited previously were represented. There has, however, been a tendency to ascribe it overwhelmingly to ethnic divisions in the country, at the expense of incipient class conflict.<sup>10</sup>

When Alhaji Muhammadu Ribadu took over as Minister of Defense on the attainment of independence in 1960, only sixty-one out of the 283 military officers were Nigerians; at the time a lower proportion of Nigerians than in any other branch of the public service. Consequently, it would have been appropriate for Ribadu to implement the recommendations of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Nigerianization whose report had stressed the urgent need for complete Nigerianization of the entire army, especially at the top echelon. On the contrary, and in spite of the parliamentary pressure to accelerate this program, Ribadu made it clear that he was not going to be hurried. In fact, at one occasion, he told the House of Representative that:

The motion underrates the difficulties, the qualifications and experiences required for the efficient running of a modern army... I appeal to both sides of the House not to bring politics into the armed forces. Because one has a brother in the army he should not get up and say Nigerianize the armed forces.<sup>11</sup>

Matters came to a head when the British head of the Nigerian army, Major General Foster was due to complete his service in March of 1962.

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<sup>10</sup>P. C. Lloyd, "Military Coups," Africa in Social Change (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1967), p. 323.

<sup>11</sup>House of Representatives Debate, Bill on Nigerianization, Vol. 1257, April 11, 1961.



Naturally, Nigerians expected that the Minister would appoint a Nigerian to head the army. Instead, Minister Ribadu sent his Minister of State for the Army, Mr. Obande to London to interview a number of British officers who could be the successor of Major General Foster. This, as one could see, was sufficient to anger well-meaning Nigerians. A Nigerian newspaper, based in the Eastern Region of the country, The Nigerian Outlook, commented:

Are we to believe that if either Lt. Col. Ironsi, or Lt. Col. Ademulegun was appointed to take over command of the Nigerian forces that Northern Nigeria would one day be invaded by the South? Or could it be inferred that since one of the most important ministries, the Defense Ministry, is under the control of a Northerner, and perhaps there is no Northerner yet qualified to command the Nigerian forces then the post of commander must continue to be occupied by expatriates?<sup>12</sup>

In another instance, the Ministry of Defense was accused of introducing a regional quota system as a basis for enlistment into the army at officer cadet level. According to an article in the West African Pilot,

The effect of the institution of regional quotas for officers was to send subgrade people for training merely to satisfy regional as opposed to national interests.

A further example of the politicization of the army by Nigerian politicians occurred in 1964 when political disagreement arose between Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. In this particular instance, there was a general discontent with the figures published out of the 1963 general census. Both the NCNC (National Council of

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<sup>12</sup>Editorial, The Nigerian Outlook (Enugu), February 23, 1962.

Nigerian Citizens) and Action Group Ministers headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe had alleged that the published figures were fabricated in favor of the Northern region; while the NNDP (Nigerian National Democratic Party) headed by Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa claimed that they were authentic figures which should be accepted by the opposing ministers. In the disagreement that ensued Tafawa Balewa was quoted as saying:

The NCNC Federal Ministers should accept the figures or resign. My acceptance and publication of the census figures is final. My people, my government, and my party are fully prepared at any hour of the day for any eventuality and would meet any challenge."<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Dr. Azikiwe had taken a bold step and had summoned the commandants of the police, Army and Navy to State House and declared that "in view of the present crisis he proposed to take control and asked for their support on the grounds that he was both President and their Commander-in-Chief."<sup>14</sup>

When this crisis ended in 1965, the expatriate Head of the Nigerian army, Major General Imelby-Everard had to be replaced by a Nigerian when he completed his tenure of office. Four brigadiers who had grown together through the rank and file were possible candidates. Aguiyi Ironsi was one; others were Ademulegun, Ogundipe and Maimalari. It was Aguiyi Ironsi who was appointed to succeed the

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<sup>13</sup>J. O. Ojiako, Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and ....? (Onisha: Africana Educational Publishers (Nig.), Ltd., 1981), p. 177.

<sup>14</sup>Okion Ojigbo, "The First Republic," Nigeria Returns to Civilian Rule (Lagos: Tokion (Nig) Company, 1980), p. 23.

outgoing Head of the Army. The political implication of this appointment was brought out in the open when Dr. Mbadiwe described how Brigadier Aguiyi Ironsi was chosen for the post. In his obituary tribute to Muhammadu Ribadu, he said:

"Ribadu had an unshakable belief in the unity of this country. Never before had the cause of Nigerian unity been so shaken as during that crisis.... Tribalism and separatism featured their worst form.... Despite all the rumors, gossips, undercurrents, and evil machinations, Ribadu came out in that heat to recommend to the Prime Minister the appointment of Aguiyi Ironsi as the Officer commanding the Nigerian army."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the appointment of Ironsi was not only an acknowledgement of his long standing seniority in the army, but a political gesture of conciliation and a calculated package to resolve the 1964-65 crisis.

Not finished, during the Western Region election crisis of 1965, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the Region and ordered soldiers stationed there to maintain peace.

These unfortunate incidents tending towards national disaster were not seen by soldiers alone. The intellectual elite were most disturbed by it. For example, Chinua Achebe wrote a satirical novel titled A Man of the People. In this novel, he describes the last days of a corrupt West African government which ended with the military taking over to cleanse the country. Dr. Obarogie Ohonbamu, a law lecturer at the University of Lagos also published a pamphlet titled Nigeria, the Army and the Peoples' Cause.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Okion Ojigbo, "The First Republic," Nigeria Returns to Civilian Rule (Lagos: Tokin (Nig) Company, 1980), p. 83.

<sup>16</sup>O. Ohonbamu, Nigeria, the Army and the Peoples' Cause (Ibadan: Africana Educational Press, 1965).

In view of the above, and realizing the fact that soldiers were constantly being invited to perform police duties plus their being aware of their growing importance in the Nigerian body politic, some military personnel felt it was inevitable that the survival of the existing structure of Nigeria depended on them. The first known political intrigues within the army occurred at this time when Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu and other headquarters officers of the same rank were involved in canvassing about an army intervention. On January 15, 1966, the Nigerian Army staged a successful bloody coup thus bringing them to prominence.

In this final part of chapter one, we shall look beyond the internal contradictions of Nigeria power politics to determine whether the frequent coups which had beset many African nations between 1960 and 1969 served as a catalyst in the sudden bloody coup which brought the Nigerian Army to power in 1966.

#### Influence of the Decade of Military Coups in Africa

A field study tour of African countries reveals that the continent experienced varying coups in the ten years preceding 1960, a decade which had boosted African independence from her colonialists. For example, at the beginning of 1960, the mutiny of the force publique in Congo had taken place. In December of the same year, the imperial guard in Ethiopia made an attempt to overthrow Emperor Hailie-Selassie. By 1963, coups in Togo, Congo (Zaire) and Dahomey (Benin) had become a reality.

This brings us to the important question, what factor affected the timing of these coups?

The answer is not far fetched. Within a few years after independence, schisms, corruption and economic malaise came to a head among prominent politicians, thus weakening the broadly based nationalist movements. Since the above anomalies were unique to the African states, the intervention of the Army was a possibility, and as soon as this took place in one country, it became contagious. This contagious assumption is validated with an extract from Colonel David Thompson's statement, immediately on his arrest for plotting to overthrow the government of Liberia in 1963. He is noted to have said that:

If only 250 Togolese soldiers could overthrow their government, a Liberian Army of 50,000 could seize power easily.<sup>17</sup>

Also, Claude Welch, in his Soldiers and State in Africa, argues that successful seizure of power in one state touches off a series of coups in the continent. He corroborates this by asserting that "the Zanzibar uprising helped to trigger off the East African Mutinies," and went further to conclude that "the intervention of Col. Christophe Soglo of Dahomey in December 1965 helped to touch off coups in Central African Republic, Upper Volta and Nigeria."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Helen Kitchen, "Filling the Togo Vacuum," African Report, Vol. VIII (January 2, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup>Claude E. Welch, "Soldier and State in Africa," Governing in Black Africa, Perspective on New States. (Marion E. Doro and Newell M. Stultz Company, 1970), p. 157.

Based on these instances, it becomes logical to accept the facts that while the internal conflict within the Nigerian Army and political arena contributed a great deal to military intervention, it would also be appropriate to know that during the period 1960-1970 the continent was beset by a series of coups; additionally, that such could not be exonerated as a contributing factor in the military's rise to power politics in Nigeria in 1966.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT UNDER GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON

In this chapter, an indepth examination is done in the performance of the Gowon Administration. This chapter is very important in the thesis because it provides the reader with background information regarding the root cause and exigences of the events that led to the final collapse of the administration under study.

A brief introduction and critique is given about the situation in the country before the advent of the regime of General Yakubu Gowon. This background is followed by a detailed study of his performance in the specific areas of national unity, management of the Nigerian Civil War, international relations and in economic development efforts.

As discussed earlier, our study and analysis of the performance of the government in question will be perplexing without a brief reflection on the exigencies of the first government whose demise brought the very government under examination to power. The first Military Government inherited many controversial problems that emanated from the poor administration of the first civilian administration. Some of the problems included: Regions wanting to break away from the nation, widespread corruption, a politics of ideological and personal differences among peoples of the country, growing frustration among soldiers, and an overall discontent regarding the existing political situation of the nation. It was the combination of these factors that

prompted the January 15th coup of 1966 which brought Major General Aguiyi Ironsi to power.

Contrary to what one might imagine, this coup which was overwhelmingly accepted at the beginning, turned out to be, as the British Broadcasting Corporation announced, "an Ibo power play to smash the Northern grip on the country."<sup>19</sup>

This was proven to be true when a list released by the Punch newspaper showed that no top prominent politician of Ibo origin (Eastern Region) was killed during the January 15, 1966 coup. Also, another list of the coup plotters revealed that apart from Major Ademoyega, all others were Ibos. Among those included were Major C. K. Nzeogwu, Major E. Ifejuna, Major D. Okafor, Captain E.N. Nwobosi and 2nd Lt. Odumegwu Ojukwu. However, there were those who argued contrarywise, one of such was Major C. K. Nzeogwu who, commenting on the reason that led to the military take over, said:

We seized power to stamp out tribalism, nepotism and regionalism... it was a truly Nigerian gathering and only in the army do you get true Nigerianism. They did it for the good of their country... we all started out in the same spirit but... <sup>20</sup>

While the B.B.C. announcement did more harm than good in establishing the credibility of the Ironsi Government, Major General Ironsi took some administrative steps which made his government short-lived. For example, he opted for centralization of democratic power through

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<sup>19</sup>J. O. Okiako, Thirteen Years of Military Rule 1966-1979 (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1979), p. 33.

<sup>20</sup>C. K. Nzeogwu, "Why the Army Took Over the Government," Thirteen Years of Military Rule 1966-1979 (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1979), p. 2.



unitarism. This was given political expression in 1966 in Decree No. 34. The decree states that:

Nigerian shall on the twenty-fourth of May 1966 cease to be a Federation, and shall accordingly as from that day be a Republic by the name of Republic of Nigeria, consisting of the whole territory which immediately before that day was comprised of a Federation.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, in Decree No. 1 of 1966, he abolished the Constitution and regional autonomy and imposed a centralized decision-making process by arrogating to the Federal Government

...the power to make plans for the peace, order and good government of Nigeria or any part thereof, with respect to any matter whatsoever.<sup>22</sup>

Within the Military Force, the

...Irons Administration was threatened on two sides. On one side there were supporters of Major Nzeogwu, who believed that Ironsi had aborted the true birth of the Revolution by his actions on 15th January 1966 when he gained control of Lagos. On another side there were Northern soldiers who were furious at the murder of the senior Northern officers in the Army. These soldiers were ready to take the law into their hands.<sup>23</sup>

Under these circumstances, the government of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi was ephemeral. His idea of unitarism was vehemently resented by many Nigerians. Riots ensued in the Northern cities with demonstrators calling for a referendum on the decree. According to Nwankwo and Ifejika:

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<sup>21</sup>J.O. Okiako, Thirteen Years of Military Rule 1966-1979 (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>N. J. Miners, "Unrest in the Army," The Nigerian Army 1956-1966 (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1967).

...riots ensued in the Northern cities, and quickly became a program against Ibo sectors of Northern cities where an estimated three thousand were killed.<sup>24</sup>

This uncertainty and hostility continued until the early hours of July 29, 1966 when Yakubu Gowon entered the political picture.

Having examined in a nutshell the issues that led the July 29, 1966 coup, we shall now proceed to examine the achievements of the Gowon Administration. Emphasis is, however, given on some specific achievements of the government. Each of the cases selected seemed in a special way significant, if nothing more than for the fact that it tends to emphasize the unique nature of the particular situation.

In this chapter our main focus shall be on the examination of his achievements in the area of national unity, the management of the Nigerian Civil War, Nigerian relations and economic development efforts.

### National Unity

Gowon's first address to the nation was made within forty-eight hours of his assuming the Office of Head of State. In the address which was greatly admired by the masses, he restored the Federal system which had been reversed to unitary system of government by Major General Ironsi.

In addition, in the anxious days of 1966 when Nigerians were skeptical of his ability to control the unpredictable political situation in the country, General Gowon displayed little of the indecision

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<sup>24</sup>F. Nwankwo and O. Ifejika, The Making of a Nation Biafra (Atsa: Goldon Star Printing Press, 1979), p. 168.

which was a characteristic of the previous administrations. Although no definite time table was set, by August 8th, he had announced plans for military disengagement. He went further to call a national conference to discuss Nigeria's future form of government. In Gowon's point of view, the aim of the conference should be:

...to find formula for continued association of Nigeria's four Regions which will not jeopardize our children's chances of building a great African nation that can command the respect of the whole world.<sup>25</sup>

Another major achievement of the Gowon Administration towards a united Nigeria, was the abolition of the four regions and the creation of a twelve state structure. Prior to this time, prominent Nigerian politicians like Chief Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and Chief (Dr.) Nnamdi Azikiwe had all suggested the creation of more states in Nigeria. Generally, the suggestions for more states in the country had been justified on one or more of the three grounds:

- (a) The need for government to be nearer the people;
- (b) The need for unity in the country; and
- (c) The need to minimize conflict between states and within states.<sup>26</sup>

One of the main reasons for the division of Nigeria into smaller states as opposed to four large regions has been the need to attain national unity which had been a major problem facing the country before

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<sup>25</sup>A. H. M. Kirk-Green, Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria, A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 136.

<sup>26</sup>J. M. Ostheimer, "Nigerian Military Government Since 1966," Nigerian Politics (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 63.

General Yakubu Gowon became the Head of State. For instance, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe once noted that:

In order to evolve into a near perfect union, the whole of Nigeria should be divided and so demarcated geographically and demographically that no one region would be in a position to dominate the rest.<sup>27</sup>

And Obafemi Awolowo was noted to have also written that:

The evils which afflicted Nigeria and brought the ruin of the first Republic may be put in a nutshell as follows, abnormal imbalance in the constituents of the Federation.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, when the twelve states were created in 1967, it was explained that the exercise was guided by the need to achieve unity and stability in Nigeria. This almost meant that the secession bid by the old regions would be discouraged. It further implied that:

- (a) Legislation would not go against the wishes of any part;
- (b) Economic development of all parts is encouraged so that no area feels neglected;
- (c) Every part is adequately represented and protected; and
- (d) Every part has equal opportunity of participation in the political process.

Another rationale behind the creation of the twelve states had been the need to minimize or completely eliminate both intra and interstate conflicts. This is because the major feature of the old regions and states was the actual or potential development of conflict in many of them. Over time there had been cases of interstate conflicts

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<sup>27</sup>N. Azikiwe, "Essentials for Nigerian Survival," Foreign Affairs, Vol. XLIII (1964-65), p. 447.

<sup>28</sup>O. Awolowo, Thoughts on Nigerian Constitution (Ibadan: University Press, 1969), p. 66.

arising from states demanding to include the people of another state. The main cause here was the fact that the interstate boundaries split many cultural groups making them minorities in different regions.

Examples of these were:

- (a) The Ijaw Tribe which was split between Mid-Western and Eastern Region. In the state structure this was passed to the Rivers State; and
- (b) The Yoruba in Ilorin and Kabba division, which formed a significant minority in the Western and Northern Regions respectively were carved out as a single state called Kwara State.

For more understanding of this problem, I have provided two maps, Figure I and II. The maps show the Nigerian regional structure and the new state structure created by General Yakubu Gowon, respectively.

Finally, the creation of twelve states in Nigeria helped in the greater sharing of federal government resources. The desire for greater opportunities for cultural development arose out of the fact that each of the regions comprised of many ethnic nations and cultural units. It was felt that such composition did not allow all ethnic nations full opportunities for the development of their culture. This was particularly the case with the three older regions in which one ethnic nation formed more than fifty percent of the population while there were other large groups within each of them. See Table I below.

With the below table, it becomes clear that the twelve states created by Gowon in 1967 achieved the following points which further served as the basis for national unity.

1. Nearness of government to the people.
2. Minimized interstate and intra-state conflicts.

FIGURE I

POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING MAJOR ETHNIC  
GROUPS AND PRE-1967 REGIONAL BOUNDARIES

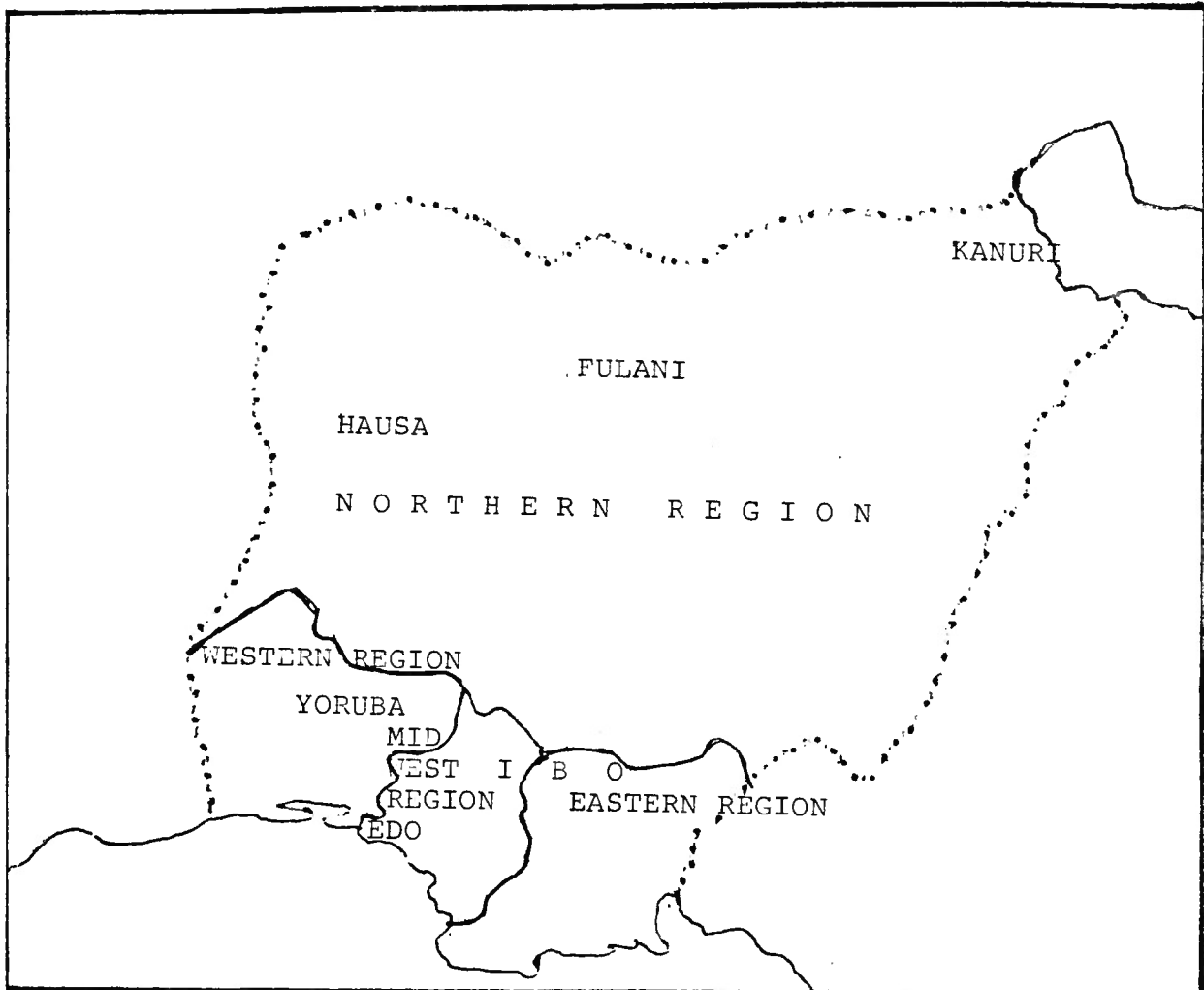


FIGURE II

POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING THE TWELVE  
STATES STRUCTURE AS CREATED BY  
GEN. YAKUBU GOWON 1967-1975

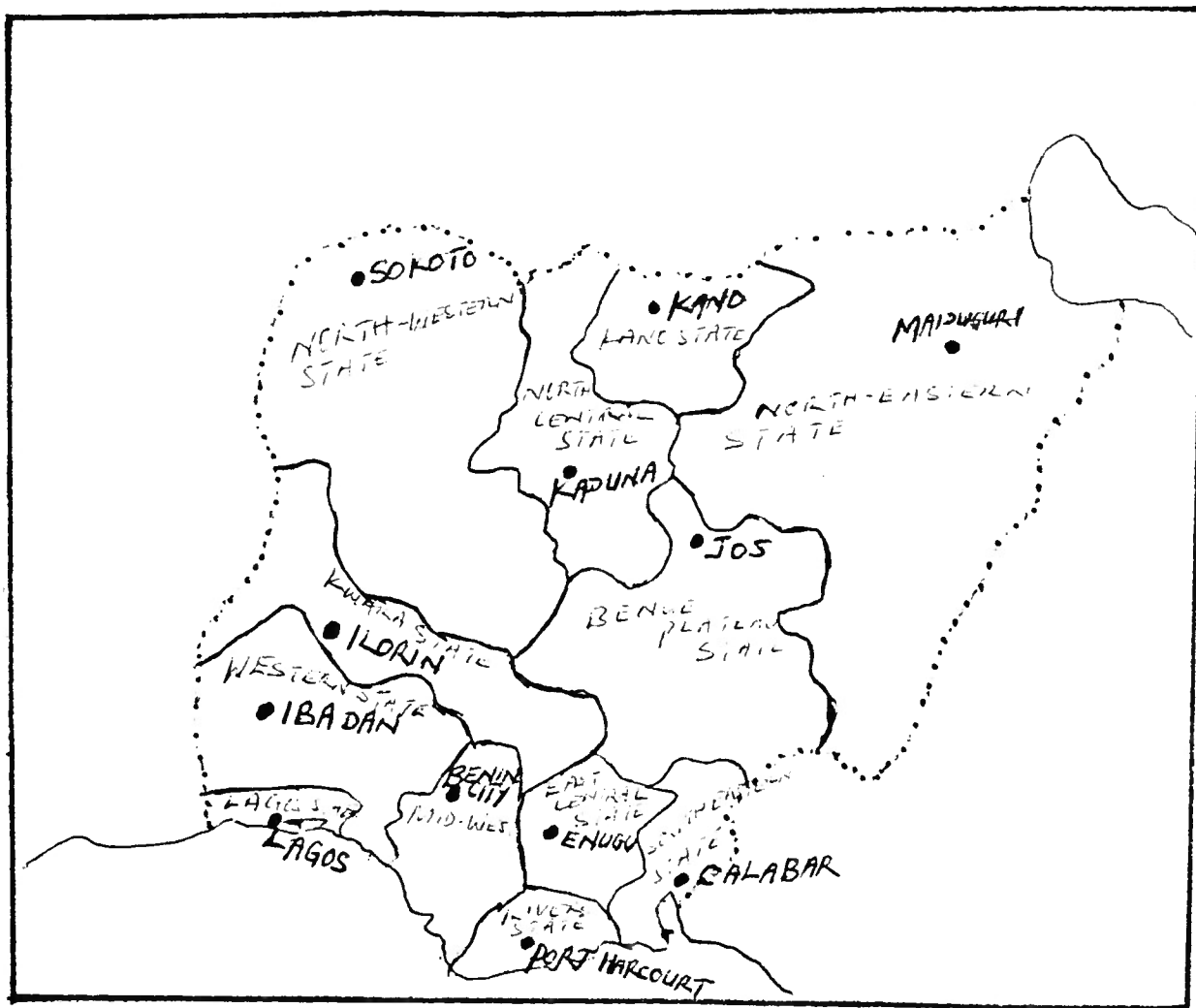


TABLE I  
NIGERIA ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF PRE-1963 REGIONS

EASTERN			NORTHERN			WESTERN		
Ethnic Nation	1963 Population 1000	%	Ethnic Nation	1963 Population .000	%	Ethnic Nation	1963 Population .000	%
Igbo (Ibo)	7,991	64.5	Hausa Fulani	16,318	54.7	Yoruba	9,777	76.4
Ibibio	2,806	22.6	Kanuri	2,258	7.6	Edo	1,704	13.3
E. Ijaw	1,072		Tiv	1,374	4.6	Ijaw	263	6.4
Ekoi	343	2.8	Yoruba	1,144	3.8	Ibo	821	2.1
Others	183	1.47	Nupe	648	2.2	Others	236	1.8
			Others	8,066	27.1			

Source: "Minutes of the Minorities Commission Sitting at Benin City," Daily Times, October 3, 1974, p. 5.

3. Solved the fear of domination which the smaller regions have always had against the larger regions.
4. It furthered the assurance of economic development of all parts of the nation because of the new economic and political diversification created by the new twelve state structure.

Another noteworthy program of the Gowon Administration for realizing national unity was the National Youth Service Corps Program. This program, which came into effect by Decree No. 24 began on May 22, 1973, had among other things, some of the following objectives.

1. To develop common ties among Nigerian youths and promote national unity.



2. To encourage members of the Service Corps to seek at the end of their Corps Service career employment all over the country, thus promoting the free movement of labor.

There is much argument to suggest that the NYSC scheme had actually achieved the National Unity for which it was designed. Ejike Ofoegbu, in his contributing article to Kwara State NYSC 1979/80 Magazine, said:

The NYSC has succeeded in congregating youths from different political, geographical, linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Their interaction in the orientation camps (via drills, sports, lectures, debates, drama, cross-pollination of ideas, etc.) and exposure to other people during their primary and secondary assignments have contributed in no small way in demolishing the banners of prejudice, promotion of friendship, national unity and understanding.<sup>29</sup>

#### Management of the Nigerian Civil War

As we noted earlier, the leadership style of Aguiyi Ironsi, the killing of the Northern, Western, and Mid-Western Regions prominent politicians without similar action in the Eastern Region by the coup which brought him to power plus the growing conception that the coup was an Ibo power play to smash the Northern grip on the country; all led to the revolt and hostilities in the Northern cities, resulting in the mass killing of Ibos. It was also what led to the coup of July 29, 1966 which brought Gowon to power. As the situation worsened, the Ibos decided on secession from Nigeria to form the Republic of Biafra. It was Gowon's attempt to reintegrate the Ibos into the Nigerian state that led to the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970. Hence, although

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<sup>29</sup> Ejike Ofoegbu, "The NYSC and the Second Republic," Kwara NYSC 1979/80 Annual Magazine (1980), p. 28.

the subsequent July 29th coup of General Yakubu Gowon made all efforts to ensure that Nigerians bury their hatchets, it failed to establish the much needed central authority of the Federal Government over Eastern states. This section of the country became quite autonomous in its relation with the Federal Government. Several attempts were made to reconcile both parties by prominent Nigerian politicians and friendly African states. An example of such a peace move was Aburi Peace Talks engineered by General Ankrah of Ghana on July 4, 1967. General Ankrah had said Ghana could not sit back while Nigeria burned. Consequently, he regarded the Aburi Peace Talks as "a round table discussion in which there was no head or tail."<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, the Aburi Peace Talks yielded no positive results. By May 30, 1967, Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu had proclaimed the independent Republic of Biafra,

...on the ground that the people of Eastern Nigeria believed that they could no longer be protected in their lives and property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

In response to the declaration of secession, General Yakubu Gowon had taken it lightly and was ready to talk things over with Col. Ojukwu. When these attempts failed, General Gowon pledged to "crush the rebellion."<sup>32</sup> The result was the civil war which lasted from July 6,

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<sup>30</sup>General Ankrah, Welcome Address, Aburi Conference Ghana: January 4, 1967.

<sup>31</sup>J. Ojiako, "1967 Nigeria's Agonising Year," Thirteen Years of Military Rule 1966-1979 (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1979), p. 48.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

1967 to January 12, 1970.

One year after the war had started, Gowon was still ready for negotiations with the rebels to maintain a united Nigeria. In a press conference held on January 5, 1968 at Dodan Barracks, Gowon said:

Seventeen leading people would be totally acceptable to the Federal Government for talks. We believe with such men who would discuss in good faith, an agreement and effective arrangements could be negotiated to ensure that territorial integrity of Nigeria is preserved while the safety and livelihood of all citizens are guaranteed. <sup>33</sup>

General Yakubu Gowon is noted to have attended most of the OAU's Consultative Committee Meetings to seek a solution to the Nigerian Civil War. In one of such meetings held at Niamey, Niger Republic, General Gowon was quoted as saying:

If the secessionist leaders continued to refuse to come to the conference table, the Federal Government will have no choice but to take over the remaining rebel-held areas. <sup>34</sup>

Yet Gowon's open-mindedness was revealed at his acceptance of the Ibos at the end of the Civil War. In his Midnight Radio Broadcast accepting the surrender of Ibos, he said:

We have arrived at one of the greatest moments of the history in our nation. A great moment of victory for national unity and reconciliation. We have arrived at the end of a tragic and painful conflict. Thirty months ago we were obliged to take up arms against our brothers who were deceived and misled into armed rebellion against their

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<sup>33</sup>General Yakubu Gowon, Press Conference at Dodan Barracks, January 5, 1968.

<sup>34</sup>General Yakubu Gowon, Radio Broadcast to the Nation, January 12, 1970.

fatherland by the former Lt. Col. Ojukwu. Our objective was to crush the rebellion to maintain the territorial integrity of our nation, to assert the ability of the blackman, to build a strong, progressive and prosperous modern state and to ensure respect, dignity and equality in the community of nations for our prosperity. Fellow countrymen, with your continued loyalty and dedication to the national course, we shall succeed in healing the nation's wounds. We must all welcome with open arms the people now freed from the tyranny and deceit of Ojukwu and his gang. <sup>35</sup>

This announcement was followed immediately with the efforts on reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction which were aimed at reintegrating the ex-Biafrans into the Nigerian body politic.

Further, he extended an open hand by hiring Ibos as his body guards and pilots. M. F. Gutteridge records that:

Not only were former opponents treated with magnanimity, but he did not preclude the development of trust and loyalty on a personal level, his employment of Ibo pilots for his own plane might well have seemed foolhardy to some.<sup>36</sup>

#### Economic Development Efforts

For our understanding of Nigerian economic development efforts during the period under study, it is proper to first of all look at the nature of her economy between 1960 and 1966.

This period shows that Nigeria practiced an agrarian economy with foreign trade earnings principally from cocoa, palm produce and groundnuts.

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<sup>35</sup>General Yakubu Gowon, Radio Broadcast to the Nation, January 12, 1970.

<sup>36</sup>W. F. Gutteridge, Military Regimes in Africa (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1976), p. 134.

Data on occupation also showed a pattern that higher percentage of the Nigerian labor force was in the agriculture sector (see Figure III).

Two characteristics were predominant in the Nigerian economy during the time under study. One was the heavy reliance on foreign earnings from agricultural products to the neglect or emphasis in manufacturing, mining, and production. Natziger attributes this to:

The colonial administrators whose early economic plan for the nation was to prepare it as an economy open to foreign trade and investment and a substantial reliance on overseas assistance.<sup>37</sup>

The other characteristic was the advanced form of interregional trade which had developed in the country. According to Alan Hay and Robert Smith the major factors making for the high volume of interregional trade in Nigeria, especially in local foodstuffs were:

- (a) The regional variation in natural resources which result in scarcity or abundance of productive factors in some regions
- (b) The considerable ecological differences between the Northern savanna and Southern coastal forest plus the uneven distribution of natural resources.<sup>38</sup>

The interregional movement of the economic goods were as follows: timber from the tropical hardwoods of the Southern forest belt was in great demand in the Northern region for the construction of houses. Coal mined in the Eastern Region was used throughout the country for fire and energy, while cocoa from the Western Region provided raw materials

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<sup>37</sup>E. W. Natziger, African Capitalism: A Case Study on Nigerian Entrepreneurship (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1977), p. 67.

<sup>38</sup>Alan Hay and Robert H. T. Smith, "Interregional Trade and Money Flows in Nigeria," The Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (Ibadan: University Press, 1970), p. 10.

TABLE II  
CHART SHOWING NIGERIA LABOR DISTRIBUTION IN 1963

Occupation	Number 000	Percentage of Labor Force
1. Professional, Technical Related	441	2.41
2. Administrative, Executive, Managerial	39	0.21
3. Clerical	228	1.25
4. Sales	2,806	15.33
5. Agriculture	10,201	55.73
6. Mines, Quarry	14	0.08
7. Laborers, Crafts	2,190	11.96
8. Service, Sports and Recreation	871	4.76
9. Others	891	4.87
10. Unemployed	345	1.88

Source: Office of Statistics, Population Census of Nigeria (Lagos: Ministry of Statistics, 1963), pp. 39-40.

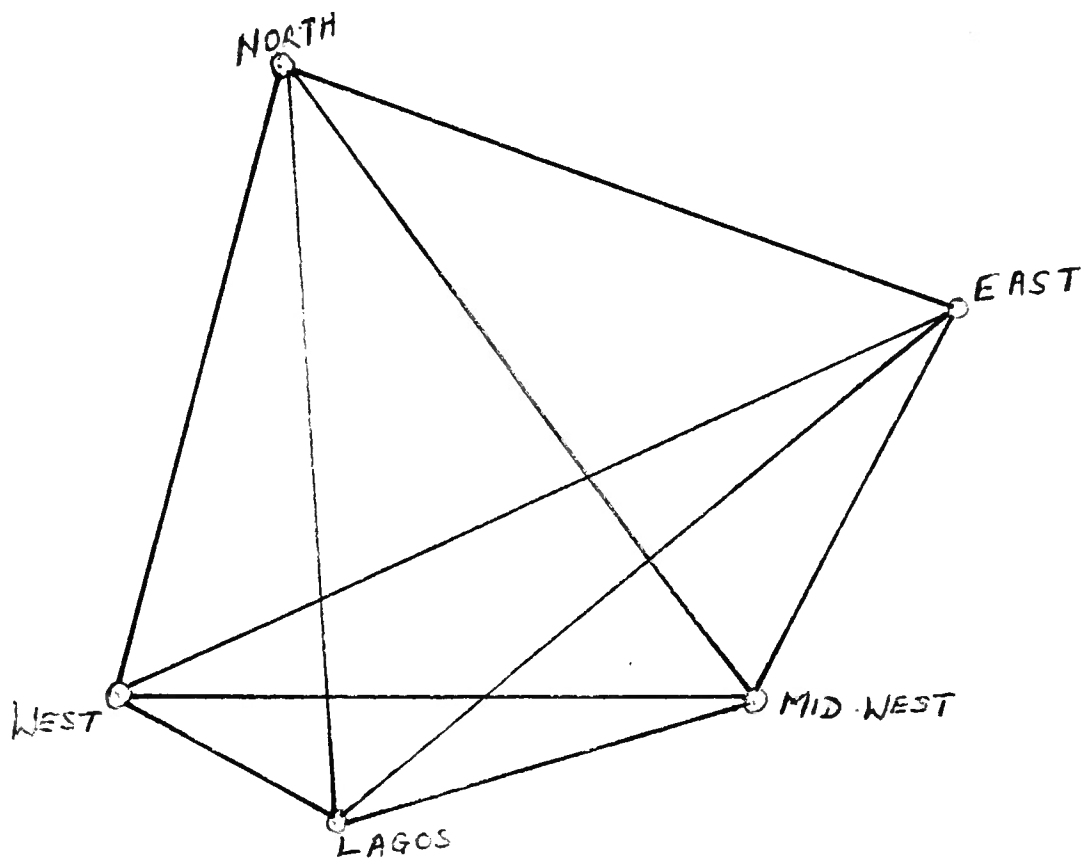
for the Northern Region's factories. Figure III shows how these movements took place.

Table II dramatizes the role of the exchange of commodities in the interregional trade economic structure. It also dramatizes the role of the North as a net exporter to all regions and that of Mid-West

FIGURE III

CHART SHOWING NIGERIAN INTER-TRADE COMMODITIES

TRADE EXCHANGES AMONG PRE-1967 REGIONS



Source: Abner Cohen, "The Social Organization of Credit in a West African Cattle Market," Africa, Vol. XXXV, No. 12 (January 1965), p. 14.

(Bendel) as a net importer. Each of the other regions had two import and export surpluses.

With the coming of military under Gowon's Administration, a more dynamic step was taken to boost the country's economy. The economic strength was shifted away from interest groups in the regions, including merchants and medium-sized industrialists, to those at the center such as government servants, and the high level personnel in the large public corporations.<sup>39</sup>

The reason for this sudden shift was because the civil service machinery reflected the principles of federal supremacy. In addition, Gowon's government was interested in creating career positions in the Government Service; and in pursuit of this objective the bureaucracy was being filled with Nigerian citizens who had graduated from the universities, polytechnics and colleges of technology. Olatunde Ojo in Federal-State Relations 1967-1974 argued that:

The new government set up was a source of new opportunities for advancement as well as a means of undermining the power of encrusted traditional authorities, and thus of accelerating the process of development.<sup>40</sup>

Above all this, the new move was an attempt to introduce Nigerians to the socioeconomic policy-making process of the country. Before the Army took over the reign of political affairs, the civilians were

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<sup>39</sup>B. J. Dudley, "The Military and Development." Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, XIII, No. 2 (July 2, 1971).

<sup>40</sup>Olatunde J. B. Ojo, "Federal-State Relations 1967-1974," Quarterly Journal of Administration, Vol. 10, (January 1976), p. 111.



contented with the subordinate relationship they had with the former Colonial masters who in fact formulated policies for the Government. Hence, an odd situation which made the leaders ignorant about the direction the country was heading towards. Wayne Nafziger noted that:

The dominant class, virtually devoid of goals and priorities that could be articulated to the masses and preoccupied with the preservation of their system of patronage did not encourage decision making by local authorities or consultation with the public. Members of parliament energetically pushed projects that would enhance their clientage base regardless of any relationship to the plans objective. The decision on expenditures involving millions of pounds were made on the basis of conversations between politicians and experts without documents or experts advice and with little ascertainable facts. The parliament was not equipped and did not have the will to make important decisions concerning the plan because of a preoccupation with the distribution of bounty to the faithful. <sup>41</sup>

It was this group of indigenous economists, planners and bureaucrats, with good educational and professional backgrounds, who drew up the second National Development Plan of 1970-74 which was to be the cornerstone of the economic structure upon which the Nigerian economic success would rest. Such instances are:

(1) Under this plan, the petroleum which was long discovered but unexploited by the previous administrations was given adequate attention. Petroleum in no time took the lead in Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, and by 1976 had become the largest component of

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<sup>41</sup>Wayne Nafziger, African Capitalism: A Case Study in Nigerian Entrepreneurship (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), p. 67.

the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As the economic indices below depict, the oil which contributed only 25.9 percent to the Gross Revenue in 1970-71 progressively contributed 67.3 percent in 1974 and 80.80 percent by 1975.

TABLE III  
SELECTED ECONOMIC INDICES OF NIGERIA  
DURING THE REIGN OF GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON

	Total Revenue	Federally Retained Revenue (NM)	Oil Revenue	Oil Revenue as % Total Revenue
1970-71	758.1	755.80	196.4	25.9
1971-72	1,410.9	1,084.33	740.1	52.5
1972-73	1,389.9	1,067.56	576.2	41.5
1973-74	2,171.3	1,733.84	1,461.6	67.3
1974-75	5,177.1	4,076.98	4,183.8	80.80
1975-76	5,861.6	4,026.15	4,611.7	73.7
1976-77	7,070.3	5,040.89	5,548.5	78.5
1977-78	8,251.2	5,574.12	5,821.48	70.6
1978-79	6,815.2	4,443.46	4,249.23	62.3
1979-80	8,805.3	6,271.12	7,350.3	

Source: Federal Ministry of Finance, Statistics Division (Lagos: 1980).

(2) To ensure even economic development, the government decided to organize agencies which experts regarded as "more important foundation stone" in developing the Nigerian economy. Some of such agencies were:

Nigeria Agricultural Bank (1973) - The long-term objective of the NAB set up in 1973 was, according to Gowon:

...to provide credit and loans for development and thereby enhance the level and quality of agricultural production including the following: horticulture, poultry, farming, pig breeding, fisheries, forestry and timber production. The aim of the bank is to improve rural life and the agricultural economy of the country by boosting income and purchasing power to the rural population.<sup>42</sup>

Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry (1973) - The principal function of the NBCI includes the provision of equity capital and funds by way of loans to indigenous persons, institutions and organizations for medium and long-term investments in industry and commerce of Nigeria.

The Nigerian Standard Organization (1971) - This was established under Decree No. 56 of 1971 and its functions were to standardize methods and products in industries in Nigeria and to ensure Federal State Government compliance with national policy on standardization.

Industrial Research Council of Nigeria - This council was established in 1971 and affiliated to the Federal Ministry of Industries. The principal functions of the council among other things, are to carry

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<sup>42</sup>Panther Bricks, Soldiers and Oil, the Transformation of Nigeria (London: Frank, Cass and Company, Ltd., 1979), p. 25.

out research activities in Nigeria and to develop and apply such industrial research results to the nation's needs.

Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Board (1972) - This Board governs the Nigeria Indigenization decree program. Its main functions as specified under Section 4(2) of Decree No. 4 of February 1972 is to advance and develop the promotion of enterprises in which citizens of Nigeria should participate fully and play a dominant role.

Since all the economic policies and decrees enumerated above were formulated with a view of ensuring that the Nigerian economy and subsequent development is absolutely controlled by Nigerians themselves, it will be worthwhile that we devote this part of the chapter to examining the degree of success brought about by their very creation.

The need for economic self-reliance was taken more seriously by the Federal Military Government immediately after the civil war after Government had experienced the consequences of excessive reliance on foreign governments and on transnational corporations. For example, the indecision of transnational oil companies about whether to make payments to the Federal Government of Nigeria or the Biafran Government had some impact on the thinking of the military rulers and this created serious doubts as to whether the transnational business community in Nigeria could be trusted or not. Another source of this decision was the direct impact the civil war had on Nigerian businessmen. The war had fostered the rise of a new bourgeoisie who accumulated easy wealth by supplying equipment, food and war material to either the Biafran or the Federal Government's side of the civil war. Since these new

bourgeoisie did not own its wealth to the assistance of foreigners (transnational companies), it began to see the latter as competing, and thus put pressure on the Government to Nigerianize the economy. Alhaji Aminu Dantata, Kano State Commissioners for Trade and Industry noted in 1972, "by promulgating the decree, the Federal Government has done what businessmen themselves wanted so badly for several years past." In the same view, P. C. Asiodu, former Minister of Mines and Power noted that "it was in the period between 1968 and 1971 that the widest consultations were undertaken leading to the promulgation of the Enterprises Promotion Decrees of 1972. Hence, despite the firsthand experience of the military rulers, the influence of these pressures from Nigerian bourgeoisie increased the distrust of foreign investors in Nigeria. This was what led to the promulgation of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree in 1972. The central objective being "to obtain Nigerian control over her economy in general and over strategic enterprises in particular."<sup>43</sup>

According to the framers of the decree, it was stipulated that by March 1974, no person other than a Nigerian citizen could be the owner or part owner of enterprises in twenty-two selected industries in Nigeria (called Schedule I Industries). Industries classified in this schedule were the small, labor intensive manufacturing and service related businesses. The decree further provided (Schedule II), in which aliens

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<sup>43</sup>Thomas J. Biersteker, "Indigenization in Nigeria: Renationalization or Denationalization?" The Political Economy of Nigeria ed. William Zartman (New York: Praeger Publisher Company, 1963), p. 188.

were not allowed to participate in industries in which the paid-up share capital was less than 200,000 dollars or the turnover of the enterprises was less than 500,000 dollars, whichever the Nigerian enterprises promotion Board deemed appropriate. However, companies exempted from these provisions were required to make available to the Nigerian public forty percent of the total equity capital (Phase I) and sixty percent (Phase II).

Forward looking as these programs may seem, evidence reveal that since promulgation the programs, especially the Indigenization Decree, have suffered some serious set back. So many reasons account for this. In a survey carried out by the Federal Ministry of Information to determine the extent of implementation it was discovered that:

- (a) Some Nigerians collaborate with foreign investors to be used as "front" in the directorship of the establishment of enterprises solely intended for Nigerian citizens;
- (b) The transnational companies are still able to maintain control over the Nigerian economic operations by entering into technical service agreement with Nigerian "directors" or "partners" that they (transnational corporations) be vested with the responsibility of providing technology, maintenance and innovation;
- (c) By negotiating exemption from the Indigenization Decree with the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives;
- (d) By bribing the government officials who are expected to implement the indigenization program; and
- (e) By appointing people of different tribes as Board of Directors with a view of "playing Hausas and Yoruba's against each other with the hope that disruption between them will distract them (Nigerian Board members) from trying to manage the company.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Thomas J. Biersteker, "Indigenization in Nigeria: Renationalization or Denationalization?" The Political Economy of Nigeria ed. William Zartman (New York: Praeger Publisher Company, 1983), p. 199.

Nevertheless, the programs have also been noted to have brought about good economic findings.

The fact that every subsequent government, since the overthrow of Gowon, seek to accept the programs and promulgate additional measures to ensure its success goes to mean that the programs are already a success by its own right. In fact, the Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo Military Government improved on the programs by adding in 1977 that:

"...the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree are to advance and promote enterprises in which citizens of Nigeria shall participate fully and play a dominant role as well as ensuring the assumption of the control of the Nigerian economy by Nigerians in the shortest possible time."<sup>45</sup>

In addition, since the promulgation of the decree, the Nigerian bourgeoisie is constantly being informed of his role as a final writer in the Nigerian economy.

Similarly, although the Nigeria Agricultural Bank, Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry and Industrial Research Council of Nigeria were established with the good faith of serving as a basis for sound industrial take-off, bureaucratic redtapism, lack of patronage by the people they were designed for and the inability of the Government to discipline its Nigerian bourgeoisie, have rendered the programs seemingly ineffective. For example, the peasant and petty traders for whose purpose the Nigerian Agricultural Bank and Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry were created are often denied loans because they

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<sup>45</sup>Federal Government Gazette, Federal Ministry of Information, June 1977, p. A19.

are hardly able to meet the collateral security demanded by the officials of these banks. While the businessmen who qualify for the loans are not monitored by either the banks or Government to ensure that loans obtained from the Government agencies are used for the purposes for which they were designed.

Furthermore, the lack of willingness by the Nigerian bourgeoisie to engage in long-term production or manufacturing activities have been the major problem facing the Industrial Research Council of Nigeria who have time and again complained that the inventions of the council are not being commercialized by the Nigerian businessmen.

All these facts therefore point to the direction that while the economic programs laid down by General Yakubu Gowon are laudable the role of the Nigerian investors whose duty it is to take advantage of the agencies served to hinder the success of the programs.

These development programs were based on the money from the oil boom which at the time seemed unending. Consequently, the boom engendered in all sections of the economy a situation where people turned to business to take advantage of the numerous economic development ventures taking place all over the country. Controlling the contract awards and other development programs in the new twelve states were soldiers, bureaucrats, commissioners and government executives. This enabled many to get rich quick, as well as enabled them the access to enlarge their connections. Therefore, there would be lawyers, gallant soldiers and politicians were diverted into petty bourgeoisie featuring as general contractors, importers/exporters, and other species of middlemen.



The issue was so pervasive that Gavin Williams noted that:

...even the intelligentsia, with its vested interest in ideological orientation towards modernizing policies has by and large been successfully institutionalized with the neo-colonial institutions.<sup>46</sup>

The economic and political policies of General Yakubu Gowon led to a re-orientation in the Nigerian state. It produced in a rapid manner a large enriched class of leaders, and middlemen as well as aspiring middlemen. Above all, it created a power interest group within the army whose desire was to take over the position of leadership so as to control the expenditures.

This chapter has therefore established the genesis upon which the fall of Gowon rested. As we shall see in the second part of this study, Gowon, by his programs, having established a political economy of state capitalism provided the basis for predatory struggle among middlemen for state patronage and unprincipled competition among public officials for control of financially lucrative government decisions.

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<sup>46</sup>Gavin Williams, "Class Relations in a Neo-colony: The Case of Nigeria," African Social Studies, A Radical Reader; ed., Peter Gutkind and Peter Waterman (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), p. 284.

CHAPTER III  
POWER INTEREST GROUPS WITHIN  
THE NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the first assumption of the study that the fall of General Yakubu Gowon was due to power competition between the Gowon faction and another faction (power interest group) who wanted to seize power and be the rulers of Nigerian politics--a position that would allow them to control the vast economy of the country.

There have been two schools of thought regarding the motives or causes of military takeovers in developing nations and in Africa in particular. The first stresses societal and structural weaknesses on the part of the ruling class whose awful performance acts as a sort of magnet by pulling the armed forces into power. A prolific writer of this category is Prof. Samuel Huntington, who argues that:

The most important causes of military intervention in politics are not military, but political and reflect not the societal and organizational characteristics of the military establishment but the political and institutional structure of society.<sup>47</sup>

A second school of thought contends that government corruption was readily used as a tool for army intervention. Dennis Austin,

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<sup>47</sup>S. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, ed John J. Johnson (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), p. 192.

a believer in this school, remarked that "the charge of corruption is usually used ex post facto to justify intervention by military forces."<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to the above schools of thought, this chapter looks at the military coup that overthrew Gowon's Administration in terms of competing ambitions for political leadership of Nigeria on the part of some military officers who had a great deal of freedom for action in the Nigerian political system within the period under study for personal economic aggrandizement.

Therefore, contemporary economic situation at the time under study is brought into focus with a few of using this economic factor as a basis for testing the hypothesis that the officers who overthrew Gowon were self-seeking colonels and brigadiers whose true but hidden motive for the coup was for:

....personal and corporate aggrandizement in a societal context of acute scarcity and intense competition from other elites such as the intellectuals, and politicians.<sup>49</sup>

For the purpose of easier understanding let us start by delineating both factions involved in the competition for political and economic control of the country.

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<sup>48</sup>Dennis Austin, "The Underlying Problems of the Army Coup d' etat in Africa," Soldiers in Politics, Military Coups and Governments (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 193.

<sup>49</sup>Samuel Decalo, Coups and Military in Africa, Studies in Military Style (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 13.

The first (faction) was made up of General Yakubu Gowon--the Head of State, his State Governors, Commissioners and top civil servants. The second group was made up of officers in the rank of colonels, and brigadiers; most of whom took active part in the Nigerian Civil War as either Sector Commanders, Brigade Commanders, or Supply Officers. Prominent in this group, popularly referred to as "War Officers," were Brigadier Murtala Mohammed, Brigadier Olusegun Obasanjo, Brigadier Theophilus Danjuma, and Col. Shehu Yar' Adua.

With Yakubu Gowon's determination to heal the nation's wounds, facilitated by the money from the sudden oil boom, the

...Nigerian economy emerged from the war as the most promising in tropical Africa. Therefore, after the war, the Second National Development Plan 1970-74 was launched as a means of reconstructing the facilities damaged by the Civil War, and to promote economic and social development throughout the country.<sup>50</sup>

In agriculture, most of the farms and plantations abandoned during the Civil War, particularly in the East-Central State and Southeastern States were rehabilitated and brought back into production. To ensure high yields, the government intensified its extension services and increased the importation of fertilizers and other requirements to farmers during the Plan period.

In manufacturing the government embarked on revival of old projects to speed up economic recovery. Examples were the revival of both

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<sup>50</sup>V. A. Olorunsola, Soldiers and Power, the Development Performance of the Nigerian Military Regime (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), p. 19.

Calabar and Nkalagu Cement factories. Large petrochemical and nitrogenous fertilizer projects were started in Kaduna. While motor car assemblies were embarked upon a Lagos (Volkswagen) and Kaduna (Peugeot).

With regard to transportation, construction of modern roads was started all over the country. Besides, the airport at Enugu had been reconstructed while contracts had been awarded for construction of new airports at Kano, Lagos, Jos, Ilorin, Benin City and Calabar. The National Shipping Line bought two new ships during the period. Still further, the Nigerian Airways acquired two Boeing 707's, two Boeing 737's and F-28 aircrafts during the Plan period.

Development in education was not left behind:

Primary level enrollment rose from 3.5 million in 1970 to 4.5 million in 1973. At the secondary level, the number of students almost doubled from about 343,300 in 1970-71 to approximately 649,900 in 1973-74. Twenty new Federal Government secondary schools, four new colleges of technology, and three new schools of arts and sciences at Ogoja and Sokoto were reconstructed. Moreover, there was expansion in university enrollment, during the period, total enrollment which stood at 14,500 in 1970-71 had risen to enrollment figures of 25,000 in 1973-74 academic year.<sup>51</sup>

Yet the most important area that advanced during this period was Nigerian external trade. According to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance.

In 1973-74 the value of exports stood at ₦2,278 billion which was almost double the figure of ₦1,248 billion indicated in the Plan period. This improvement was due almost entirely to

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<sup>51</sup>Second National Development Plan, Interim Report, Federal Ministry of Statistics (Lagos: 1974), p. 20.

increases in both the price and output of crude oil.<sup>52</sup>

Within this period, Nigeria under Gowon maintained a very high upward movement of imports of goods as cement, iron, and steel. These goods assisted in facilitating economic development through construction of the necessary infrastructure.

Under the above circumstances, considerable competition developed in the international business arena among multinational corporations as well as individual businesses to have some kind of business relationship with Nigeria. It also generated a situation where Nigerians constituted themselves into various species of middlemen, importer/exporter, brokers and the like.

Now that we have described the general economic situation, we may proceed to demonstrate how individual actors attempted to enrich themselves by manipulating the use of state power. Two case studies are offered to dramatize the point: one involving the auction sale of oil, and the other, the appointment of a technocrat into decision making position in the oil sector.

As we are aware, the preponderance of relationships between countries are economic. And as already noted, Nigeria has an import/export economy as well as an indigenous business community engaged largely in commerce. By describing how this commercial system operated, I hope to demonstrate how a policy of state intervention to promote economic development intensified competition and introduced a new set

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<sup>52</sup>Second National Development Plan, Interim Report, Federal Ministry of Statistics (Lagos: 1974), p. 24.

of actors, the new actors being those who overthrew the government of General Yakubu Gowon.

A respectable theorist in the field of commercial capitalism is Terisa Turner. According to her, countries with commercial capitalism are those which depend on foreign industrial production for virtually all locally consumed manufactured goods. This aptly described the Nigerian economy under Gowon. According to her studies, in a commercial capitalist country, import/export, distribution, transport, wholesale, retail and petty trading are the main business features. Hence, in this kind of situation, commercial activity takes the form of middlemanship with the local businessman organizing the foreign seller's access to the local market. All the same, in a country that practices state capitalism, the state becomes the major buyer and uses its position as a state to regulate other commercial activities. The net result of this, she argued:

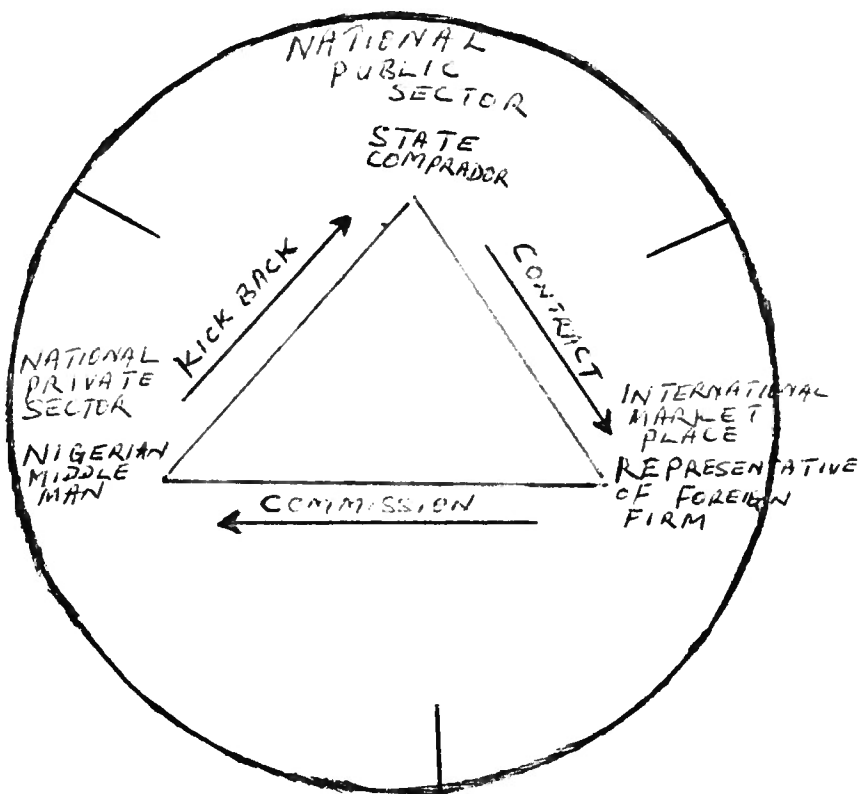
...is that since the state controls opportunities to profit through commerce, politics becomes dominated by struggles for positions in the state or for access to those who have influence over government decision.<sup>53</sup>

The relationship between foreign businessmen and local actors from the national private and public sectors, she called "Commercial Triangle." Parties to this triangle include the businessman who represents the multinational corporations, the local middlemen who assists the former in gaining access to the local market and the state

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<sup>53</sup>Panther Bricks, "Commercial Capitalism and the 1975 Coup," Soldiers and Oil, the Transformation of Nigeria (London: Frank, Cass and Company, Ltd., 1979), p. 169.

comprador who uses his offices to perpetuate the cycle. Perhaps a better way of explaining the issue of commercial triangular relationship would be the diagram shown below.



Source: Panther Bricks, Soldier and Oil (London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1977), p. 171.



The above diagram shows a commercial triangular relationship between the state comprador, the foreign interest representative, and a local middleman. Since Nigeria practices state capitalism, would-be political actors aspire to occupy the most unique position of state comprador. It was the competition to occupy this position that motivated the power interest group to seek to oust Gowon.

As discussed earlier, only two case studies shall be discussed to validate the above assertion, one being the Oil Auction Sale, and the other the appointment of Mr. Ordor. The relationship between these examples and the study is that the two incidents were offered by the coup makers as justification for overthrowing General Yakubu Gowon.

In addition to the three parties to the practice of commercial capitalism, the state capitalist country is influenced by another group of actors--the technocrats. Technocrats could be broadly referred to as people with professional training in some area of production who are in the public corporations. Therefore, the division of labor in such an economic setting would require an interdependence among specialists (technocrats) and the other three who constitute the commercial triangle.

In the words of Terisa Turner (a well-known Nigerian-based British political scientist):

The political economy of a commercial capitalist society is defined largely by efforts to establish triangular relations and to operate them profitably. Instability is endemic in the struggle among middlemen for state patronage and in the competition among officials of state for control of decisions. In these circumstances politics is a form of business through which actors seek influence in the state not

in order to make and apply general rules, but in order to secure advantages.<sup>54</sup>

Having established the surrounding events, which would lead to tension among officers, we shall proceed to illustrate how the tension between two strata of state capitalist officials (Gowon faction) versus a loose alliance of would-be compradors of state capitalist, who joined forces with some technocrats in making allegations against the former and their political advisers which brought the final collapse of Gowon regime.

As we noted earlier in the study, although large quantities of oil were discovered in Nigeria as far back as 1958, the civilian government (1960-65) took little interest in oil, and so no policy was initiated. However, after January 1966, the Shell-BP, a pioneer and major oil producing company in Nigeria, offered the new military regime improved financial terms. Since the issue had to do with funds, they were handed over to the Ministry of Finance who established a petroleum section to develop oil policies. However, although a Ministry of Mines and Power existed at this time, there is no reported evidence of any significant functions it performed regarding the oil; apart from the traditional regulation of foreign oil companies.

Nevertheless, Adbul Atta, the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Finance and latter Secretary to the Federal Military Government used his influence with General Yakubu Gowon to advocate a strong state role in the oil industry. Above that, he took a step further by forming

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<sup>54</sup>Panther Bricks, "Commercial Capitalism and the 1975 Coup," Soldiers and Oil, the Transformation of Nigeria (London: Frank, Cass and Company, Ltd., 1979), p. 182.

cadres of professionals and technicians to handle each post in the oil business. By 1972, he had successfully sold to Gowon the idea of Nigeria's joining OPEC, and also set up two oil related institutions. One was the Petroleum Advisory Board while the other was the Nigerian National Oil Corporation whose duties were "to advise and implement policies regarding oil in a coordinated and efficient way."<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, with increased revenue from oil and Nigeria's subsequent heavy reliance on it, the Ministry of Mines and Power viewed with suspicion the expansion of the Ministry of Finance into what it regarded as "her sphere of interest."<sup>56</sup>

Under the Nigerian Second National Development Plan 1970-74, dozens of parastatals were established. These were known as corporations and were operated as public enterprises. However, what was important was the efficient management of the oil. The decree establishing the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC) had established that:

...the Chairman of the NNOC's Board was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Mines and Power, while the Chief Executive was to be appointed by the Federal Executive Council on the advice of the Commissioner for Mines and Power.<sup>57</sup>

With this, two things then stemmed out. The Ministry of Mines and Power had to start afresh building up its staff of petroleum

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<sup>55</sup>O. Ojiako, Thirteen Years of Military Rule 1966-1979 (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1980), p. 143.

<sup>56</sup>P. C. Asiodu, "Some Aspects of Nigerian Oil Policy, 1971-1975" (Lagos: Duplicated, 1977), p. 2.

<sup>57</sup>Decree No. 18 of 1971, Establishing the Nigerian National Oil Corporation, April 1971.

technocrats while those in the Ministry of Finance, prior to 1971, had to stay without jobs. It was at this point that opposition and competition evolved among the technocratic faction involved with the most valued commodity and mainstay of Nigerian--oil. As we shall now see, "the confrontation that gradually grew in the oil sector led to each person involved trying to curry support from any higher officer for intervention."<sup>58</sup>

The first major open confrontation arose in connection with a crude oil auction sale in 1973, the year oil was scarce on the international market. Following the example of other OPEC countries NNOC's Marketing Division advertised an auction and called for bids. The Ministry of Mines and Power had not officially authorized the Oil Corporation to undertake an auction of crude oil nor could it order the halt of the exercise under the tense situation.

Meanwhile, exports were expected to start on January of 1974. The Nigeria National Oil Corporation made a great effort to have buyers chosen and contracts signed. Consequently, by December 18th and 19th the NNOC sent invitations to companies to state whether they were interested in purchasing the oil at the price offered by the highest bidder in the auction exercise. According to P. C. Asiodu:

Seven companies responded on December 21, 1973 with mandates to bid. By the following day Texas Chemical and Plastics, Coastal States, and Phillips Petroleum had agreed to pay \$22.60 per barrel for about 40,000 bd each, over a two year period with

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<sup>58</sup>Terisa Turner, "Oil Administrators and the 1975 Coup," Soldiers and Oil, ed. K. Panther Bricks, p. 180.

contract revisions possible each three months  
in accord with market conditions.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, when these companies arrived to conclude the oil deal, they were told that the crude, except 50,000 barrels reserved for the Ghana Supply Corporation which had been promised oil by General Gowon, would not be sold again. A few days later, the oil was sold to companies that were not among the original bidders, "at prices which were low compared to those offered in the auction bid."<sup>60</sup>

Given the shady manner in which the oil sale was handled, tremendous excitement and anger was generated among Nigerian state officials, technocrats and businessmen who bided for the oil unsuccessfully. Asiodu, in his article, published after the fall of Gowon recounted that:

More generally, some military officers and Nigerian businessmen viewed the action as one more manifestation of state monopoly in a lucrative area and these middlemen who were frustrated in their attempts to secure oil compared their failure with the conspicuous success of one Nigerian who mediated in the earlier Gelsenberg and Tenneco Ministry sales.<sup>61</sup>

In another account, the Seven Sisters reports that after the above incidence, the NNOC prepared a price proposal to be adopted in the marketing of Nigerian oil:

When the Ministry expressed reluctance to adopt the proposals, NNOC technocrats went to Gowon who backed their price regime. The example of NEPA workers in dislodging Asiodu and Gowon's support on the price issue encouraged NNOC management to take a stand on the way it and oil policy were being administered.

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<sup>59</sup>P. C. Asiodu, "Some Aspects of Nigerian Oil Policy 1971-75" (Lagos: Duplicated, 1977), p. 2.

<sup>60</sup>Financial Times (London: February 17, 1976), p. 10.

<sup>61</sup>Terisa Turner, Commercial Capitalism and the Fall of Gowon.

In so doing, technocrats supplied state officials with a record of Ministry activities in oil. NNOC's submissions, commonly known as the first and second memoranda, apparently triggered actions which contributed to the overthrow of the Gowon regime.<sup>62</sup>

The above, in its entirety, demonstrates the hidden interest in oil business held by private indigenous businessmen and military officers. Realizing how much harm this kind of involvement over oil business could bring to the government's integrity, Gowon decided to once and for all settle the issue of having to appoint a General Manager to entirely manage the Nigerian National Oil Corporation. In Kirk Green's account:

Both the Head of State and the Commissioner considered that the position of G. M. NNOC must be held by an indigence. The Permanent Secretary was instructed to make suggestions which were subsequently submitted to the Commissioner on April 1, 1975.<sup>63</sup>

According to the same source, the Permanent Secretary of Mines and Power's choice for General Manager was Mr. I. G. T. Ordor, then head of the country's only refinery at Port Harcourt. One of the two other candidates was backed by Murtala Mohammed. S. K. Panther Bricks records that:

The view was widely held that Ordor was subject to Asiodu's influence. Secondly, that he prominently supervised Biafra oil production during the Civil War; he went on to conclude that one of the members of the Federal Executive Council, Murtala Mohammed, backed a candidate with only four year work experience in a job with Agip since graduation, but he was from the North.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>The Seven Sisters, Petroleum Intelligence Weekly, Issue No. 2 (London: Hodder and Strough, October 1975).

<sup>63</sup>A. H. M. Kirk Green, Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Source Book, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

By July 4, 1975, Mr. Ordor's name appeared along with names of other candidates who had little or no experience in oil. After much debates on the issue at the Federal Executive Council, Mr. Ordor was appointed the new General Manager of the Nigerian National Oil Corporation. Brigadier Murtala Mohammed is reported to have interrupted General Gowon, challenging the final appointment of Mr. Ordor in favor of his candidate, ending his speech with the words "It would have been more honorable for Gowon to announce that he had appointed the man himself by executive order."<sup>65</sup> The explosive Executive Council session ended on that note with Gowon maintaining that Mr. Ordor assume the position of General Manager of the NNOC.

The result of Murtala's discontent over the failure of Gowon to appoint his candidate to be the General Manager of the Nigeria National Oil Corporation was revealed exactly twenty-five days after the fateful Council Meeting. On that day, July 29, 1975, General Gowon had left for the OAU Meeting at Kampala, Uganda; it was announced that he was no longer the Head of State due "to the events of the last few months."<sup>66</sup> Murtala Mohammed, the new Head of State explained that the affairs of State had become "characterized by lack of consultation, indecision, indiscipline and even neglect."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>P. C. Asiodu, "Some Aspects of Nigerian Oil Policy 1971-1975" (Lagos: Duplicated, 1977).

<sup>66</sup>Joseph Garba, Radio Broadcast to the Nation, July 29, 1975.

<sup>67</sup>Murtala Mohammed, Inaugural Address to the Nation, July 30, 1975.

As event would show, Murtala Mohammed demonstrated that he ousted Gowon for selfish reasons when on the 6th of August 1975, about seven days after Gowon had been ousted, he revoked Mr. Ordor's appointment as the General Manager of NNOC. The letter which was signed by Brigadier Obasanjo read, "In view of the fact that your appointment was not regular, it has been decided that the appointment be terminated." On the thirteenth of the same month, Murtala Mohammed banned permanent secretaries from Federal Executive Council Meetings unless specifically invited. Worst occurred on the twelveth of September, when Permanent Secretary Asiodu, whom Murtala Mohammed had transferred from the Ministry of Mines and Power (Oil Ministry) to the Ministry of Housing and Environment, was retired from the Civil Service.

The above case study vividly provides indications of the utility of the general framework of the Nigeria political economy visa-a-vis commercial triangular relationship illustrated earlier in showing how cut-throat competition led to the desire to control the oil production of Nigeria and led to the overthrow of Gowon. The gradual removal of P. C. Asiodu the Permanent Secretary of Mines and Power serves as a pointer to the grand design of the new actors to manipulate and control the oil business.

With the understanding of how the power interest groups successfully took over political power, we shall now take a step further to view in detail how this group, after ousting Gowon, distributed the strategic political positions among themselves. We shall also look at how they flanked themselves with promotion and wealth.



In doing this, it would be proper to first of all identify some of the key actors and their motives. Murtala Mohammed was first seen during the July 1966 coup against Major General Ironsi's rule. During the Nigerain Civil War he was seen again when his bravery repelled the Biafran Army from Midwest State. He subsequently led the Second Division as commander. After the War he was promoted by Gowon and made the Federal Commissioner of Communications in appreciation of his contributions during the Civil War.

Lt. Col. Olusegun Obasanjo's prominence started during the Civil War. As an officer in charge of the Engineers Corps of the Second Division his task was to rebuild the bridges on Ore-Benin Road. His performance here assisted the Federal troops in the offensive counter attack they waged against the rebels who were heading for Lagos. At the tail end of the Civil War he was appointed to replace Brigadier Adekunle as the Commander of the Third Division (Third Marine Commando). It is believed that his tactical surprise on the Biafrans at Ulli Airport, through the creek rather than by land, dealt the final blow on the Biafrans; who then had no other choice but to surrender. At the end of the Civil War, he was also compensated when General Gowon appointed him to the post of Federal Commissioner of Works.<sup>68</sup>

Other prominent officers were Col. Yisa Dokko, who served as the Chief of Air Operations during the Civil War; Commander Adelanwa, who served as the Chief of Naval Operations during the Civil War;

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<sup>68</sup>A. Arnold, Power Politics in Nigeria (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 70.

Theophilus Danjuma, who served as a Sector Commander during the Civil War; and Joseph Garba, who was the Commandant, Federal Brigade of Guards, Lagos.

Since it was the Federal Government military troops who won the Civil War, the war officers were acclaimed war heroes by the people of Nigeria; consequently, they had political favor of being appointed Commissioners to the Federal Offices, parastatals and government agencies. The officers therefore believed that the survival of the nation depended on them. Sources holds the views that:

...the officers were hardly satisfied with their present positions compared to the State Governors who had opportunities to award contracts and had fed themselves fat, while they (war officers) were in the war front for three years.<sup>69</sup>

Under these circumstances tension of hatred, jealousy and over-zealousness grew among the war officers to be in command of the nation's body politics. Before this escalated to the open, both Udoji and Adebo Commissions, instituted by Gowon to look into the problems of the public sector, had appealed to Nigerians for "cooperative relationships among people" and not a "contest for power and rewards." According to the report, this contest for position of power had:

...led to animosity and jealousy between professional officers and administrators, between administrators and intellectuals and had led to the impression that Nigerians do not like each other.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jidda Ibrahim Wazri, Personal comment on the discussion on why Gowon was overthrown.

<sup>70</sup> Udoji Report, West Africa, Vol. 3050 (December 8, 1975), p. 1473.

As Table IV, on the following page points out, all the prominent war officers took the strategic offices as soon as they succeeded in removing Gowon.

They entrenched themselves in the positions they long aspired for by promoting themselves to the shoes of those removed from the Gowon government. Hence, by the 8th of January 1976, the new promotions were announced and dated back to the 29th of July 1975, the very day Gowon was ousted.

However, it is important to point out that the selfish aggrandizement of this set of officers was soon detected, or at best suspected, by the Nigerian masses who questioned the authenticity of the promotions nearly five months after they (new leaders) overthrew Gowon's government, where the officers had stayed on specific ranks for over six years. In a response to critics of the promotions, Lt. General Theophilus Danjuma said "Nigerian Army officers were "rank shy" in the past, but the time had come for them to assume the ranks commensurate with their responsibility.<sup>71</sup>

Ironically, a month after these promotions were made, another coup occurred in Nigeria. Although this coup failed to come to power, it succeeded in assassinating General Murtala Mohammed, and in answering questions relating to the reasons for the abortive coup, Lt. Col. Joseph Dimka told the presiding judges (court marshall) that:

The coup plotters were opposed to the recent promotions of Brigadiers to Generals. They were particularly critical of the appointment of Theophilus Danjuma as Chief of Army Staff.

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<sup>71</sup>Daily Times, January 17, 1976, p. 8.

TABLE IV

THE POSITIONS OCCUPIED BY THE OFFICERS WHO OUSTED GOWON DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, SOON AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, AND AFTER THE SUBSEQUENT OVERTHROW OF GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON FROM OFFICE AS THE HEAD OF STATE AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES

Name	Postion at War	Post Civil War Position Under Gowon	Position After Coup
Brigadier M. Mohammad	Commander Second Division	Federal Commissioner of Communications	Head of State and Commander in Chief of Nigerian Armed Forces
Lt. Col.O. Obasanjo	Officer-in-charge, Army Engineer Corps, Commander Third Division	Federal Commissioner of Works	Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters
Brig.I.D.Bisalla	Commander First Division	Commander Defense Academy	Federal Commissioner of Defense
Col.J.Garba	Commander Federal Brigade of Guards	Position Constant	Federal Commissioner of External Affairs
Lt. Col. Yar Adua	Deputy of Garba, Federal Brigade of Guards	Position Constant	Federal Commissioner of Transport
Col. Adekunle	Handed over to Lt. Col. Obasanjo as Commander of Third Division (3rd Marine Commando)	General Manager Nigerian Airways, Was Dismissed from Army by Gowon when Found Guilty of High Level Ills of Drug Deals and Corruption	Dismissal Revoked to Read Retired

Source: O. Oyediran, "A Reflection on the 1975 Coup," Survey of Nigerian Affairs 1976-77 (Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1978), p. 290.

TABLE V  
THE NEW RANKS OF GOWON'S OUSTERS AND THE  
DAYS THEIR PROMOTION BECAME EFFECTIVE

Name and Rank Before Coup	New Ranks Five Months Later	Effective Date
Brig. M. Mohammed	General	July 29, 1975
Brig. O. Obassanjo	Lt. General	July 29, 1975
Brig. T. Y. Danjuma	Lt. General	January 1, 1976
Brig. I. D. Basalla	Major General	January 1, 1976
Lt. Col. Shehu Yar-Adua	Brigadier	January 1, 1976
Col. Joseph Garba	Brigadier	January 1, 1976

Source: Federal Government Gazette, February 1976.

To restore General Yakubu Gowon to the leadership of the country, they argued that he was not given a chance to change his style of leadership which they acknowledge to be purposeless and corrupt.<sup>72</sup>

Another pointer to the selfish interest designed by the power interest group for overthrowing Gowon is revealed when we examine their social behavior. This suggests that the group could not be exonerated from corruption for which Gowon was allegedly removed. An example of this is the ten billion Naira (N10 billion) telephone contract award through Chief Mosheed Abiola barely a few months after the overthrow

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<sup>72</sup>O. Ojiako, "Dimka's Attempted Coup and Trial," Thirteen Years of Military Rule 1966-79 (Lagos: Daily Times Press, 1979), p. 147.

of General Yakubu Gowon. According to personal interviews with Miss Tokumbo and Jidda Ibrahim Waziri who were sisters-in-law to Murtala Mohammed and subordinate of Murtala Mohammed respectively, evidence suggest that M. K. Abiola was an in-law of Murtala Mohammed, as former Federal Commissioner of Communications and Signals was aware of the impending telephone construction contract award which the Gowon Administration was about to execute. According to this source:

The relationship between M. K. Abiola and Murtala Mohammed vis-a-vis the expected kickback on the proposed telephone construction award acted as a major force in the sudden removal of Jack Gowon.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed when Murtala Mohammed assumed office as the Head of State of Nigeria, one of the first major contracts awarded by the Federal Ministry of Communications is said to be the telephone contract award.

Another evidence was Dr. Ohonbamu's affidavit before the Benin Magistrate Court. The affidavit was a protest against the asset declaration exercise which Murtala Mohammed had requested of all top public office appointees. In the affidavit, Dr. Ohonbawu argued that although Murtala Mohammed declared his assets to the public a few months after the success of his coup, that such action was a strategy designed to cover up his (Mohammed's) share of the kickback from ₦10 billion telephone construction contract which he would use to offset his (Mohammed's) losses in the properties he declared for the Nigerian public.

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<sup>73</sup>The interview with Miss Tokumbo and Jidda Ibrahim was held some-times in November 1982. Tokumbo is a D.Pharm student at Mercer University and a sister to the late General Murtala Mohammed's wife, while Jidda Ibrahim was a one-time secretary under M. Mohammed during the period Murtala Mohammed was the Head of State of Nigeria.

In addition to this evidence, the fact that it was made a campaign issue between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent Nigerian, and leader of the Unity Party of Nigeria versus Mosheed Abiola who was a member of the National Party of Nigeria during the 1979 election campaigns gives credence to the shady deal. According to Chief Awolowo, "when voted into power, I sincerely promise to release the details of the ten billion Naira ITT contract award."<sup>74</sup>

It would therefore be adequate for us to close this chapter with an extract from Eric Nordlinger statement that:

Coups are motivated by the defense or enhancement of the soldiers corporate interests. Despite the praetorians assertions to the contrary - despite their claims that they acted for public reasons on behalf of constituencies and nation. Almost all coups are at least partly and usually primarily inspired by the military's own interests. And while these interests partisan to the institution as a whole, it is clear that many individual officers desire special benefits from the realization of corporate interests in the way of rapid promotions, salary increase and greater power and prestige as well as opportunities to enrich themselves.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Okion Ojigbo, "Election '79," Nigerian Returns to Civilian Rule (Lagos: Tokion (Nig) Company, 1980), p. 143.

<sup>75</sup>E. A. Nordlinger, Soldiers in Politics, Military Coups, and Governments (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 193.

CHAPTER IV  
GENERAL GOWON'S ADMINISTRATIVE INEFFECTIVENESS  
IN DEALING WITH THE CONTINUING POLITICAL AND  
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AFTER THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

In this last part of the study, we shall dwell on my second assumption about the ineffectiveness of the Gowon Administration with emphasis on the post Nigerian Civil War era, with a view of determining how the coup plotters capitalized on these shortcomings to overthrow Gowon. The analysis is strictly based on the Nine Points Program and its accompanying agencies initiated by General Gowon which were intended to act as his guideline in realizing what "the ordinary citizens want," being "peace and stability, the only condition under which progress and development are possible."

The chapter uses the post Civil War Nine Points Program as a base because of the historical sequence of events at the time in question. Three phases of Gowon's rule were noticeable during the period 1966-1975. The first phase saw Gowon as a young soldier with primitive characteristics just emerging into the national political arena (July 29, 1966 to 1967). The second phase saw Gowon combining his humane characteristics with a bit of toughness at war (1967-1970). His last phase, 1970-1975 showed him as an emerged proud and ambitious Head of State who had the audacity to tell his countrymen that:



...from the general attitude, utterances and maneuvers of individuals and groups during the past few months, it is clear that those who aspire to lead the nation on the return to civilian rule have not learnt any lesson from our past experience. There is no doubt that it would not take them long to return to the old cut-throat politics that once led this nation into serious crisis.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, within this period he was followed by the citizens who had to adjust to his three postures. For example, in the inception of his Administration (1966-1967), he was viewed with skepticism as to his strength and ability of binding together the almost torn apart nation. At war (1967-1970), he was able to wield the entire support of the people of Nigeria and consequently winning the three years civil war. The post Civil War period produced a man who became intoxicated with earlier successes and prone to misjudge his actual relationship with his critics and peers and to perceive the relationship he now had with the people. It was an attempt to revive the continuity of the loyalty and support of the drifting masses that Gowon came up with the idea of the Nine Points Program in the early 1970's.

Succinctly stated, the Nine Points Programmes were the:

1. Reorganization of the Armed Forces
2. Implementation of the National Development Plan and repair of war damage
3. Eradication of corruption from the national life
4. Settlement of the question of more states
5. Preparation and adoption of a new constitution

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<sup>76</sup>General Yakubu Gowon, Radio Broadcast, October 1, 1974.

6. Introduction of a new revenue allocation formula
7. Conducting a population census
8. Organization of election of popularly elected governments in the states and at the centre

As could be viewed, all the above programs were desirable in the post Civil War of Nigeria to ensure national harmony and national unity in good faith. We may combine two or more of these programs into functional areas so that we can understand their relationships to the coup.

First, let us combine reorganization of the army, the implementation of the national development plan, repair of war damages, and introduction of a new revenue allocation formula into administrative measures on which some actions were unavoidable.

The second category should be eradication of corruption from national life, and conducting a population census. These are grouped into one category with the view that considering the Nigerian political culture, they are moral ideals which would require considerable time to implement. While the settlement of the question of more states, new Constitution, organization of genuinely national political parties and conducting a civilian election respectively could be grouped into another category; since they were steps aimed at the restoration of civilian politics.

As suggested earlier, it is my assumption that Gowon's inability to effectively channel the different organs of the government towards the realization of the above stated goals were the main factors that

contributed to the decision of his adversaries to overthrow him. It would also be my contention that it was the failure of this growing ineffectiveness that made most of the Nigerian masses direct overwhelming support to the power hungry young officers which then constituted their power base.

At this juncture, it would be better to put our argument in a coherent but serial framework for easy understanding. Taking the issue of demobilization of the Army for instance, during the Civil War the Nigerian Army unprecedentedly rose to about a quarter of a million troops. After the war, the need to demobilize them became undeniable. From the military executives point of view, "many men were poorly equipped, inadequately trained (including many too rapidly promoted to the officer's ranks) and forced to live in make-shift accommodations."<sup>77</sup> While from the civilian point of view, the army boys having returned from the war front, "became indisciplined, a threat to normal daily life and a drain on the public funds."<sup>78</sup> In a statement by Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was the then Federal Commissioner of Finance, it was revealed that the amount being spent on defense and maintenance of the army was more than double what was being spent on two or more sectors combined. In addition, some of the soldiers constituted social threats to the innocent civilians, especially the traders who had to move from one state to another for business. They were always victims of soldiers turned armed robbers. The subsequent imposition of the

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<sup>77</sup>Soldiers and Oil, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup>O. Ohonbawu, The Army and the People's Cause (Ibadan: African Educational Press, 1976), p. 76.

death penalty for armed robbery is a pointer to the gravity of the situation. The major problem to the Gowon Government was of course how to demobilize the Army without increasing the urban unemployed and the number of armed robbers already in the street. To this threat, the most that the Gowon Administration could offer was:

...his proposal to transfer some military men to more productive and less dangerous public employments by retraining them as either police-men, firemen, prison wardens or custom officials.<sup>79</sup>

This was never put into reality. What was more, the image of the army as a social institution became a joke and served as a major area of ineffectiveness of the Gowon post civil war government. This contributed to the decline of respect and credibility he had in the minds of the Nigerian armed forces.

Gowon's proposal to conduct a nation-wide census provided an opportunity for his military government to succeed where a civilian government had already failed. Thus, the issue of national census was another big test to Gowon's effectiveness at the time, not only because the 1963 census conducted by civilians turned out to be unreliable, but because in the Post Civil War Nigeria with economic bouyancy especially with the Second National Plan period and rehabilitation efforts, national data were necessary. For example, data would be needed for the redrawing of the state boundaries, and for the determination of the constituencies towards the eventual return to civilian rule. Also, accumulated data was necessary for the allocation

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<sup>79</sup>J. Oyinbo, Nigeria: Crisis and Beyond (London: Charles, Night and Company, Ltd., 1978), p. 71.

of revenues on a per capita basis. Gowon had employed soldiers to accompany each enumerator during the census, yet the figures were overly inflated in many areas. According to Jean Herskovitz:

The preliminary results of the census which were expected shortly after the enumeration were not announced until May 1974. Those results and the ferment that followed them abruptly changed Gowon's plans. He is well aware of the political importance of the figures and announcing them in May he said, "The public should appreciate their provisional nature." The words "preliminary" and "provisional" appeared in his brief speech nine times. His reversal in saying the figures "should not, be used for planning purposes" showed the government's nervousness. For the provisional total was, he said, 79.76 million; the 1963 figure, believed inflated had been 55.65 million. The total shocked Nigerians less, however, than the distribution among their twelve states. The six Northern States were said to have more than twice the numbers of the smaller but more densely populated six Southern States.<sup>80</sup>

This discredit to the regime brought about by the failure to conduct an effective census was damaging to the entire Army which had seen itself as a correction regime.

Thus Gowon's continued failure to redeem his promises aroused the ill-feelings and suspicions of some sections of Nigeria, especially the class of old politicians who resigned before General Yakubu Gowon, who loved going back to politics, and young military officers who felt Gowon had overstayed his time.

Another program where he failed was the eradication of corruption in the national life: dishonest practices were noted to have continued

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<sup>80</sup>Jean Herskovits, "Nigerian: Africa's New Power," Foreign Affairs, An American Quarterly Review, Vol. 53, (January 1975).

on a widespread basis and this no doubt was corrosive to the national morale. Encouraged by the post civil war oil boom (the era of petro-Naira), and the numerous developmental efforts, the rich had become richer while the poor got poorer with "the nation becoming foremost capitalist in outlook."<sup>81</sup> This encouraged and heightened social vices as highway robbery, bribery, nepotism and corruption at its peak. Corruption was so widespread that the sales clerk at the post office was unlikely to sell stamps unless he is given something up front. Although the accusation of corruption was rampant, there is a school of thought which believes that such was campaign propaganda to bring the Gowon Administration down by some of the numerous power interest groups within the Nigerian body politik. An example of this viewpoint is Jean Herskovits who in "Nigeria: Africa's New Power." The Foreign Affairs, American Quarterly Review Journal argued that:

...people with political ambitions, some of them politicians from pre-coup days - held forth in the press without restraints. They challenged census figures, forecasting revived North-South fears, and so fueling them. The lively newspapers did their own investigative reporting, searching out high-level corruption. Sometimes they found it, but they were more selective - Gowon thought vindictively so. All over the country one sensed excitement but also mounting nervousness as rumors piled on rumors, of political battle reminiscent of the sixties, and of eminent coups. The government did little to silence the critics while the press brought down one Federal Commissioner over charges of corruption and a Military Governor was similarly accused.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ndika Otonfi, "The Rationality of the Rich in Nigeria," Africa Social Studies: A Radical Reader, ed. Peter Gutland and Peter Waterman (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).

<sup>82</sup>Foreign Affairs, An American Quarterly Review, Vol. 53, No. 2, (January 1975), p. 330.

The events discussed above all pointed to Gowon's paralysis in the face of unreformed political behavior. Gowon having been primarily responsible and able to hold the nation together in the difficult days of 1966-1970 was supposed to have known of the threat by the old politicians as well as the emergence of a new military elites, and would have strived to abide by certain promises especially the promise to return to civil rule. Instead, Gowon felt staying longer in office without silencing his critics would stop their ambitions. In his independence speech, October 1, 1974, he said:

Four years ago when I gave 1976 as the target date for returning the country to normal constitutional government, both myself and the military hierarchy believed that by that date, especially after the bloody civil war for which there had been a great deal of human and material sacrifice and from which we had expected that every Nigerian would have learnt a lesson, there would have developed an atmosphere of sufficient, stability.

We had thought that genuine demonstration of moderation and self control in pursuing sectional ends in the overall interest of the country would have become the second nature of all Nigerians. Regretably, from all the information at our disposal, from the general attitude, utterances and manoeuvres of some individuals, groups, and from some publications during the past four months it is clear that those who aspire to lead the nation on the return to civilian rule have not learnt any lesson from our past experiences.

In spite of the existence of a state of emergency which has so far precluded political activity, there has already emerged a high degree of sectional politicking, intemperate utterances and writings which were deliberately designed to whip up ill-feelings within the country to the benefit of the political aspirations of a few. There is no doubt that it would not take them long to return to the old cut-throat politics that once led this nation into serious crisis. We are convinced that this is not what the honest people of this country want.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>General Yakubu Gowon, Radio Broadcast to the Nation, October 1, 1974.

Gowon finally declared the much expected target date of 1976 to be unrealistic, since "rigid adherence to it would be a betrayal of trust and would throw the nation back into confusion." No new target dates were fixed. This is where Gowon committed the greatest administrative error of his time. According to him, the military:

...had the responsibility to lay the foundation of a self-sustaining political system which can stand the test of time in such a manner that each national political crisis does not become a threat to the nation's continued existence as a single entity which ensures a smooth and orderly transition from one government to another.<sup>84</sup>

It is the desire of this study to point out that this was the administrative error that marked the fall of Gowon. Because, since there were recognized power interest groups waiting anxiously for 1976, the sudden change of program by Gowon would naturally be misrepresented as wanton monopoly of power by him. Above all, during the address, Gowon informed the Nigerian people that he would change all the military governors in 1976 while he remained as the Head of State. His failure to do this further depressed some military officers who felt eligible to be made Commissioners and Governors of States.

As we shall see, immediately after the speech, commentators were quick to point out that Gowon's position was both unrealistic and irrational. The New Nigerian daily paper, for example, noted that:

...the kind of peace and stability which the Commander-in-Chief seemed to want...is impossible in a huge and diverse country with a fairly well

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<sup>84</sup>General Yakubu Gowon, Radio Broadcast to the Nation, October 1, 1974.



developed political culture and with the political power prize being the privilege to dispense vast resources.<sup>85</sup>

Matters became worse when after this announcement the existing Military Governors decided to save for a rainy day. The Nine Point Programs were abandoned as the Military Governors and top civil servants indulged in an unquestionable "grab, grab" attitude, as well as in the appointment of friends and relatives into strategic positions to ensure or to perpetuate their sources of income when retired. According to the Nigerian Tribune, the "permanent secretaries became partners in crime with their political heads, and quite often the masterminds of business deals"

It was the attitude according to Murtala Mohammed which was "the straw that broke the camel's back."<sup>86</sup>

In sum, tension between administrators in the Ministries, between military officers who felt inadequately compensated after the Civil War and the general competition to be the helm of political offices so as to be able to accumulate immediate wealth, all combined to unleash the coup which ousted Gowon on July 29, 1975.

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<sup>85</sup>New Nigerian, October 2, 1974.

<sup>86</sup>West Africa (September 16, 1975), p. 1146.

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